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ABSTRACT

Factors which determine secondary school students' participation in homework assignments were examined. Students of diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds in three high schools in Perth, Western Australia, responded to questionnaires and interviews and kept homework diaries. Teachers, administrators, and parents also responded to the questionnaires. The research centered on: (1) students', teachers', administrators', and parents' attitudes toward homework; (2) the most favorable conditions for its completion; (3) time spent on homework; (4) homework demands in different subject areas; and (5) homework and low achievers. Results showed a wide range in the time spent by ninth grade students on homework, from none at all by about one third of the students to over two hours by about fifteen percent of the students. A dramatic increase occurred in the amount of time spent on homework between the tenth and eleventh grades. Low achievers tended to participate in homework, when it was given, as readily as high achievers. Social background did not appear to be significant. Homework tended to be done more when its purpose had been clarified and the teacher's belief in its value had been demonstrated. Students and parents regarded it mainly in a pragmatic light, rather than for any intrinsic value. Most teachers saw it as a strategy for finishing off class work and preparing students for upper school. They perceived that its value was limited for low achievers. Appendices containing the questionnaires, interview and diary formats, statistics on average weekly hours on homework, and teachers' preferences for types of homework are included. (JD)

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SECONDARY SCHOOL HOMEWORK

Frank Coulter

with
Research Assistance by
Sheila McHale

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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FOREWORD

Early in 1979, Dr Frank Coulter (then a senior lecturer at the University of Western Australia and currently Head, School of Teacher Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education) wrote to me regarding a proposed study of secondary school homework. Since this was an issue of considerable relevance to schools I was pleased to support the notion that the study be undertaken jointly by the University and the Education Department.

Homework is one of those topics about which most of us can speak from personal experience. It has long been an integral feature of secondary schooling, affecting the lives of countless students, teachers and parents, and constituting one of the more tangible links between school and home.

Class-room teaching and student assessment frequently proceed on the assumption that students will participate in set homework. However, while many students, teachers and parents accept the necessity for homework, others doubt its value and argue for its discontinuation. Often one hears comments such as "students are set too much (or not enough) homework", or "students are given the wrong kind of homework". Despite the contentiousness of the topic, it has received little serious attention from researchers in recent years. While there is an abundance of opinion about the usefulness of homework, there has been little factual evidence to guide the practitioner.

The present study addresses some of the more important issues associated with homework and makes a significant contribution to research on this important topic. Based on case studies conducted in three senior high schools, the report examines factors affecting secondary students' participation in homework. I congratulate Dr Coulter on providing such a timely and relevant document and thank the staff and students of the participating schools for their co-operation with the research team.

I commend the report to the serious consideration of principals and teachers in our schools.

D. Mossenson

February, 1981. DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF EDUCATION

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This research was supported by the Education Department of Western Australia and the Department of Education at the University of Western Australia. The author acknowledges, with thanks, the support and advice of the Committee of Management, whose members were Dr Nathan Hoffman, Mr Peter Hill, Dr Keith Punch and Mr Derrick Tomlinson. Research assistance from Ms Sheila McHale, the principal research assistant, and Ms Caroline Gill is acknowledged with gratitude. Special appreciation is extended to the administrators, teachers and pupils in the schools that participated in the research, and to the parents of the pupils. For the sake of anonymity these schools must remain unnamed, but without their co-operation the research would not have been possible.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This report is written for teachers, administrators, parents and others who may be interested in the homework process. Every effort has been made to present the findings concisely and in a form that acknowledges the importance of rigour, but which is free from unnecessary technical language. Where possible, the ideas have been reported in the terms used by those people interviewed in the course of the research. For the convenience of those who have not the time to read the report in detail, its major findings are summarized as a brief general statement in the final section.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

Homework is a controversial issue. Its advocates claim that it encourages student initiative, develops independent learning skills, and allows time for practice and application of what has been learned in school. Its critics argue that it encroaches upon children's leisure time and denies them the time for access to community activities. They also see homework as a powerful instrument of class discrimination because children from lower income homes often do not have conditions appropriate for home study and must compete on unequal terms with their middle-class peers.

It is not the intention of this study to indulge in a homework-versus-no-homework debate. It assumes that, in the context in which homework is set, those children who participate are likely to achieve better in school than those who do not participate. This is because there are demonstrable links between certain kinds of homework such as extended reading, revision, practice and drill, and improved pupil performance. Links are most explicit in cases where time spent outside normal class hours is devoted to assignments or preparation for in-class tests which count as part of the pupil's formal assessment. In some Australian school systems the replacement of final examinations by cumulative assessment, much of which is assignment-based, has emphasized the significance of this commitment of out-of-school time to formal learning and school achievement. Students who cannot or will not commit such out-of-school time to the cumulative assessment programme or other school-related learning may not achieve grades as high as those who can and do, simply because they do not participate.

What conditions are most likely to gain pupil involvement? Experienced teachers are familiar with differences in homework behaviour both between classes and within a class. Student responses range from complete acquiescence to outright non-compliance. However, little is known about the factors which affect pupils' levels of commitment to various homework tasks. They might include the

teachers' behaviour when homework is introduced, the pupils' personal resources, or support, sanctions or other influences from the home. They may be influenced also by activities that compete with homework for the student's out-of-school time. This research seeks to identify the factors that influence students' involvement in various homework tasks and to explain what "being involved" means in terms of pupil time in the various secondary school subjects. This latter aspect of the research will allow comparison between students in terms of the time omitted to out-of-school studies.

Homework as a neglected aspect of time on task research

It is curious that, amid the current flurry of interest in time as a factor in school learning, researchers have paid little attention to time on learning out of school as a factor in achievement. Recent research by Bennett (1978) implies that differences between primary schools in the time allocated to subjects has a significant effect on school learning - more allocated time in mathematics, for example, resulting in higher mathematics achievement, all other things being equal. Bennett confined himself to a consideration of time allocated during the school day. At the primary-school level, where formal homework is often not emphasized, this may be reasonable. However, at the secondary level students encounter significant amounts of out-of-school time allocated as 'homework'. The time allocated to the various subjects in school is relatively fixed, but homework time varies according to school policy, parent and teacher expectations, and pupil choice and circumstances. If time is as important for learning as Bloom (1976), Block (1971), Bennett (1978) and other time-on-task researchers assert, then a better understanding of the use of out-of-school time is called for.

Although there have been ample statements of opinion and numerous reports of practices, there have been surprisingly few well-designed studies that provide substantial evidence of the kind or amount of homework which should be assigned. Goldstein (1960) reported that, of 280 articles on homework over the 30 years to 1958, only 17 were reports of experimental research. Hedges

(1971) revieved 40 "thorough" studies that had been published since 1954 and concluded that there was no firm or comprehensive evidence on the various facets of homework. In the same year Rosenshine (1971) noted that there had been no study of actual classroom behaviour related to homework. Rosenshine's comment did not quicken research interest; fewer than 20 theses or reports of research on school homework have appeared since 1971 and none of these has involved any direct observation of classroom activities related to homework. Significantly also, homework remains unmentioned in the writings of time-on-task researchers. Although teachers and pupils place heavy reliance on homework, especially in secondary school, researchers remain more concerned with teacher and pupil behaviour as it relates to school-based learning. To assume that it is the classrooms where all the action is may be quite inappropriate. A crowded curriculum, cumulative assessment, competitive examinations, and independent assignment or project-based learning cause an overflow of work from school into the home. Indeed, the fact that much formal (and informal) learning goes on outside the classroom may help to explain why demonstrated relationships between teaching behaviours and pupil achievement have been so persistently weak. The exclusion of home study from the teaching-learning model used by classroom researchers implies that an insufficient range of teaching and learning activities relating to achievement have been considered.

In view of the significance of homework in the lives of pupils, their parents and their teachers, the dearth of research evidence is surprising. Perhaps its neglect illustrates a weakness in educational research - that it proceeds in a piecemeal fashion with arbitrary boundaries drawn between research areas according to interests and expertise of researchers. This may explain the sharp division between research into formally assigned learning inside and outside school. An alternative view is that learning in those two contexts is intimately interrelated. The present research attempts to cross the boundary between home and school learning by exploring their points of connection. This necessarily involves consideration of such things as teachers' homework-related behaviours, pupils' attitudes and their other out-of-school activities, the conditions under which homework is done, and home study support structures.

Homework: a definition

Preliminary interviews with teachers and pupils established that homework was perceived as school work formally assigned by subject teachers to be completed outside class time. It may be done during school time and study periods, in transit between school and home, at home, at a friend's home, or in any other place. The discussions with teachers and pupils indicated that homework can include the following types of tasks:

Finishing work commenced in class

This is perceived by pupils (but not always by teachers) as one of the more important kinds of homework because pupils work at different rates in class. There are instances where completion of homework involves only a few slower students. These few students are nevertheless important, for they may be involved in regular homework to keep up with classwork. In other cases, such as writing up an experiment carried out in class, all class members may be involved.

Revision of classwork

This includes practice, drill, or memorization relating to work covered by the class teacher in class time. It relates to consolidation of classwork rather than preparation for tests.

Preparation for future classwork

A wide range of tasks is included in this category. It may involve preparatory reading, TV viewing, short reference or research assignments, exploratory mathematics exercises, study for a test, or other activities that provide a basis for specific future class activities.

Extended research and assignment work

The important characteristic of homework in this category is that it involves extended independent research by the student. The research may enrich and extend work carried out in normal class time, or it may be on an unrelated topic. Often this homework involves activities that are not possible in class time, such as extended reading, research or problem-solving. These tasks vary from short assignments to major projects extending over several weeks or longer.

Shorter independent study tasks

This category includes tasks of a shorter duration and which require the application of particular skills. Included in this last category is English composition-writing, and diagramming, mapping or note-taking from texts. As in the previous category, these tasks involve independent work that is not of a revision or drill kind. However, they can be distinguished from those in the previous category because they are usually completed within an hour.

Private study

This task refers to independent study when the student has little or no other set work. It is seldom mentioned by pupils or class teachers, but is a separate category prominent in the minds of school administrators.

The above categories are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. However, they served as an initial working definition to provide participants in the research with a shared frame of reference. It should be added that this definition goes beyond the popular stereo-type of homework as a sedentary or home-based activity. It encompasses a wide range of learning activities including research in the community and direct observation of natural phenomena.

SPECIFIC AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The major concern of the research has been described as relating to the factors associated with pupil participation in homework. The research questions that guided the initial phases of the inquiry are set out below. It is emphasized, however, that these questions were regarded as entry points rather than fixed parameters within which the study would proceed.

They were as follows:

(1) To describe pupils' homework responses in terms of

(a) the criteria which are applied when deciding between homework and other out-of-school activities;

(b) the commitment made to homework in terms of time spent and the value attributed to it; and

(c) the constraints which are perceived such as independent study skills and home learning environment.

(2) To describe the conditions under which students are most likely to participate in various kinds of homework activities.

(3) (a) To describe teachers' classroom behaviour as it relates to the introduction and structuring of homework and its follow up.

(b) To investigate the relationship between teaching behaviour and pupils' homework responses.

(4) (a) To investigate the amount of time that different sub-groups of pupils spend on homework in different subject areas.

(b) To investigate the homework demands that different subjects and combinations of subjects make upon pupils.

Within the scope of the present research, answers to the first three of these questions were sought at the Year 9 level, which is the second year of secondary education in Western Australia. The investigation relating to Question 4 was carried out at the Year 8 to Year 11 levels of the secondary school. A description of the pupils, teachers and the schools involved in the study is provided later in this report.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON HOMEWORK*

The following review of school homework research is by no means exhaustive. However, that which is discussed is considered in some detail. The concern of the review is with empirical research rather than with more descriptive literature that reports the opinions and practices of parents, administrators and teachers.

In Chapter 1, it was noted that there is a dearth of well-designed homework studies that might help teachers and administrators to formulate appropriate homework policies. It is perhaps this lack of credible objective evidence that has allowed homework to remain an issue clouded by opinion rather than one that is informed by fact.

Apart from studies that have surveyed the attitudes of parents, teachers and pupils towards homework, the research falls into three broad categories. The first includes those studies that have investigated the persistent and popular question of the effect of homework on school achievement; studies in the second category have examined how homework is best structured and sequenced; and those in the last group have investigated the efficacy of different feedback and grading strategies. Each of these categories of homework research will be considered in detail.

HOMEWORK AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Research into the relationship between homework and school achievement was stimulated by the homework debate in Amercia during the 1930s. Because this early research (DiNapoli, Cook & Brown 1937, Crawford and Carmichael 1937) was conducted in a climate of controversy, its guiding hypothesis tended to define the issue somewhat crudely as one in which homework, whatever its nature, did or did not affect school achievement. Both the

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* Sections of this review are drawn from Coulter, F., Homework: A neglected research area, British Educational Research Journal, Vol.5, No.1, 1979, pp.21-33.

findings and the quality of these early American studies varied. On the whole, the data from these studies supported the view that regularly assigned homework enhanced school achievement. However, the researchers and school administrators who interpreted the data argued that it offered little support for the retention of homework. Together with considerations relating to the problems experienced by children of low income families, this interpretation of the research contributed to a shift in America towards less homework and more school-based study.*

A major weakness of these early studies was that homework was usually seen in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. It was considered as a treatment which, regardless of its quality or the conditions under which it was carried out, would affect school learning. Little concern or interest was shown by researchers in the kind of homework set or the manner in which it was structured or followed up. More recent research has focused on the kind of homework involved and has offered clearer support for the view that there is a relationship between school achievement and certain kinds of regularly assigned homework. Koch (1965) reported significant differences in favour of arithmetic homework groups over no homework groups at the upper primary level. Maertens & Johnson (1972) also reported that homework in arithmetic at the upper primary level was associated with school achievement. Doane (1972) reported that the relationship between homework and mathematics achievement was strong for high-achieving students but weak and non-significant for low achievers. This result is particularly interesting because the homework assignments examined were drills to consolidate work covered in class. It is possible that the low-achieving group did not understand the concepts introduced in class and the homework represented a task far more difficult than revisionary drill. Ten Brinke (1967) also reported a tendency for higher-ability students to profit more from homework. In his sample of upper elementary mathematics students he found some evidence

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* The research designs used in the studies discussed in this section are appraised in more detail in Coulter, F., 1979, ibid.

that higher-ability students achieved better under the homework condition than in supervised study at school, and that lower-ability students profited more from supervised study than from homework.

These last two studies (Doane, 1972 and Ten Brinke, 1967) illustrate a shift that has taken place in homework research over the last thirty years. Few researchers are still interested in testing the global-homework/no-homework hypothesis. Studies investigating the relationships between certain kinds of homework and the school achievement of particular kinds of students are more likely to provide useful information than those that persisted for so long with the question of how school achievement was affected by a lot, a little or no homework. Common sense suggests that some students will profit from additional time on certain tasks. The real questions relate to which students, which tasks, which sequences and which structures.

THE INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURING OF HOMEWORK

The majority of studies in this section have considered the manner in which homework may be best organized to introduce students to new work or to review work already covered in class. Most of these have been comparatively recent, short-duration, experimental studies in which achievement differences between control and experimental groups have been attributed to particular homework structures. Typical are the studies of Laing (1970) and Butcher (1975), who both investigated the effects of "massing" homework problems pertaining to a particular topic or to one concentrated assignment as distinct from distributing the identical problems over several assignments. Over a four-month period with ten teachers and experimental and control groups totalling 526 Grade 8 mathematics students, Laing reported differences in initial learning and retention that tended to favour the experimental or distributed group. In Butcher's study, which involved 13 Grade 9 mathematics teachers, each with a massed and "distributed" group, all significant differences favoured the distributed pattern, especially for middle- and low-ability students.

Two studies have examined the effects of exploratory home exercises. In a study of 143 junior high school pupils, Friesen (1975) reported algebra achievement differences that favoured students who had exploratory home exercises for two days before the class teaching of the topic and review exercises for two days after the instruction. The control group followed a traditional programme of homework problems relating to the particular day's work. The experimental group out-performed the control group both on text-book chapter tests and on a retention test four weeks after the completion of the unit. These findings are consistent with those of Peterson (1971), who reported gains in mathematics achievement through the use of "semi-oblique" organizational patterns in which students began exploring the next topic before completing the previous one.

This small group of studies relating to the distributive patterns of homework indicates that achievement may be enhanced by

(1) exercises of an exploratory nature that provide an intuitive base for new class work; and

(2) revision exercises that are spaced over time, particularly in the case of low-ability students, who may be less able to meet the shorter and more intensive demands of massed review exercises.

The latter point stresses the importance of varying the structure and content of homework assignments according to pupil ability. This need for individualizing homework is highlighted by findings about the substantial variations in the time that different children spend on the same homework task. In the Belgium study by Hotyat (1968), which surveyed 2000 students from age 12 to the last year of teacher training, the maximum time taken over homework assignments was considerably more than twice that of the minimum time at all grade levels. Cole & Lunzer (1978) also reported large time variations in their study of the kinds of reading required for homework. In their sample of nearly 1000 students from Nottingham schools, students took anything

from 15 to 90 minutes to write a short composition, from 10 to 45 minutes to complete a volume calculation, and from 10 to 30 minutes to draw a simple diagram in science. These findings, together with those of Doane (1972), Butcher (1975) and Ten Brinke (1967), discredit the popular assumption of teachers and researchers that homework assignments are blanket rather than individualized tasks. Much more work needs to be done to determine how content is best structured and sequenced for students of widely different capacities for independent study. A useful starting-point might be for teachers and researchers to make a clearer distinction between general ability in a subject area on the one hand and the ability to study independently on the other. Having drawn such a distinction, teachers and researchers might analyse more carefully the extent and nature of independent study skills demanded by various homework tasks. It is interesting that only one homework study (Hudson 1965) has attempted to relate school achievement to an estimate of students' independent study skills, and even in that case it was only a crude estimate derived from students' own perceptions of their capacity for independent study.

Although this group of studies points to the importance of the teacher's role in structuring and sequencing homework assignments, there is no evidence of any attempt to observe directly the manner in which teachers go about this task. No information is given about the time that teachers devote to explaining the objectives of homework, the nature of their follow-up or the manner in which they relate homework to further classwork. What teachers actually say or do to prepare their students for home study has not been reported. Perhaps more important, there is little evidence of direct observation, whether from diary records, interviews or home visitations, of the kind of support structures that parents, neighbours and older siblings provide.

STUDIES OF DIFFERENT HOMEWORK GRADING AND FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

Studies in this third area relate to feedback research. Most of them are of the experimental type. Achievement differences

between groups under study have been attributed to various experimental grading and feedback treatments. Illustrative of this research is the study by Austin & Austin (1974), who assigned students from two junior high school mathematics classes to two treatments in which they either received grades on every homework problem or on a random half of the problems. After seven weeks they found no achievement differences between the two groups. In a later study, Austin (1976) extended this and related work by Page (1958) by randomly assigning pupils from nine high school mathematics classes to two treatment groups in which their homework was either corrected and graded without comment, or in which it was given a grade plus written corrective information, praise or encouragement. In only two of the nine classes involved did the "comment" group score significantly higher on teacher-constructed tests. In a similar study Small Holtan & Davies (1967) reported no differences in the geometry acchievement of students whose homework was collected and graded four times weekly, and those who received only spot checks and daily quizzes.

Several questions may be raised about the above findings. The first relates to the difficulty of assessing the quality of the comments and their impact on particular students. The assumption is that all comments within a particular broad category are equal. This is inappropriate because various students perceive the same comment differently, depending on their attitudes towards the subject, towards the teacher or towards themselves. Moreover, the absence of any comment may convey to some students a far stronger non-verbal message than any perceived by a "comment" group.

A further problem is that the non-significant differences reported in these studies may have been artefacts of achievement tests that were not logically related to the feedback and grading strategies. For example, in Austin's (1976) study, the effect of fedback was related to regular teacher-constructed examinations of the work concerned in class and at home over the six-week

period of the study. Homework averages were not included. It may have been more appropriate to have related homework feedback strategies to homework achievement and to certain aspects of pupils' affective responses to the teachers' comments and to the homework assignments concerned. This tendency for researches to relate homework strategies to general school achievement rather than to homework achievement is a little difficult to understand. Where the teachers' homework strategy relates to specific structuring and feedback approaches, it would seem to be more appropriate for researchers to compare their treatment groups on homework performance. The long-term interest of researchers could still be in summative evaluation as referenced by school performance over a longer period of time; but in the shorter term, which is only a matter of weeks in the majority of these experimental studies, the relationships might better be investigated as part of a formative process that might ultimately affect more general achievement.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOMEWORK

The research discussed in this section reveals a persistent assumption that the variable of interest is "home" work rather than after-school, independent study that might involve a variety of activities of a sedentary or non-sedentary kind, either in the home or in the community. This narrow view of the major variable has led to an extraordinarily narrow range of issues researched, with the vast majority of studies being in the area of mathematics problem-solving. Of course, researchers' preference for the study of traditional mathematics over other homework tasks may relate to the fact that the variables are more readily quantifiable.

There have also been problems with the treatment of factors associated with homework achievement. The failure of research to take adequate account of the extent to which homework tasks drawn upon various independent study skills has been discussed earlier. In addition, the majority of studies reviewed have failed to take into account the varying conditions under which

homework is actually carried out. This is curious in view of the concern that has been constantly expressed about home environment since Reavis (1911) and Brooks (1916), in two of the earliest empirical homework studies, noted the importance of home conditions, parental attitudes and supervision. Where home environment has been included as a variable, it has generally been by a global measure of social class. Although a measure of social class may provide an indication of attitudes or physical conditions that occcur more frequently among some socio-economic groups than others, it may say virtually nothing about other aspects of the home learning environment that may be relevant to home study. Two such factors are the presence or absence of sibling tutors, and the capacity of parents, however willing and supportive, to provide help in unfamiliar curriculum areas. Each of these conditions will vary within any socio-economic status group, and might well be considered along with such physical conditions as the availability of space, light, warmth and quiet.

Much of what has been discussed implies that the model within which homework research has proceeded is incomplete. Many of the teaching behaviours relating to the introduction and structuring of homework remain unconsidered. Similarly, no attention has been given to students' responses to the expectations that teachers set for homework. For example, little is known of the student's decision-making process regarding homework, including the criteria that are applied in choosing between homework and various other alternatives that occupy leisure time; and, as suggested earlier, home learning conditions have been narrowly defined within the concept of social class.

These various facets of homework are articulated in Fig.1, which summarizes much of this discussion and provides a general framework within which the present research proceeded. Like all models it is simply a set of propositions rather than descriptive of what is actually know to be the case. In the case of the present research it represented little more than a preliminary sketch of elements involved in the homework process and their possible relationships. Within the scope of the present research, most

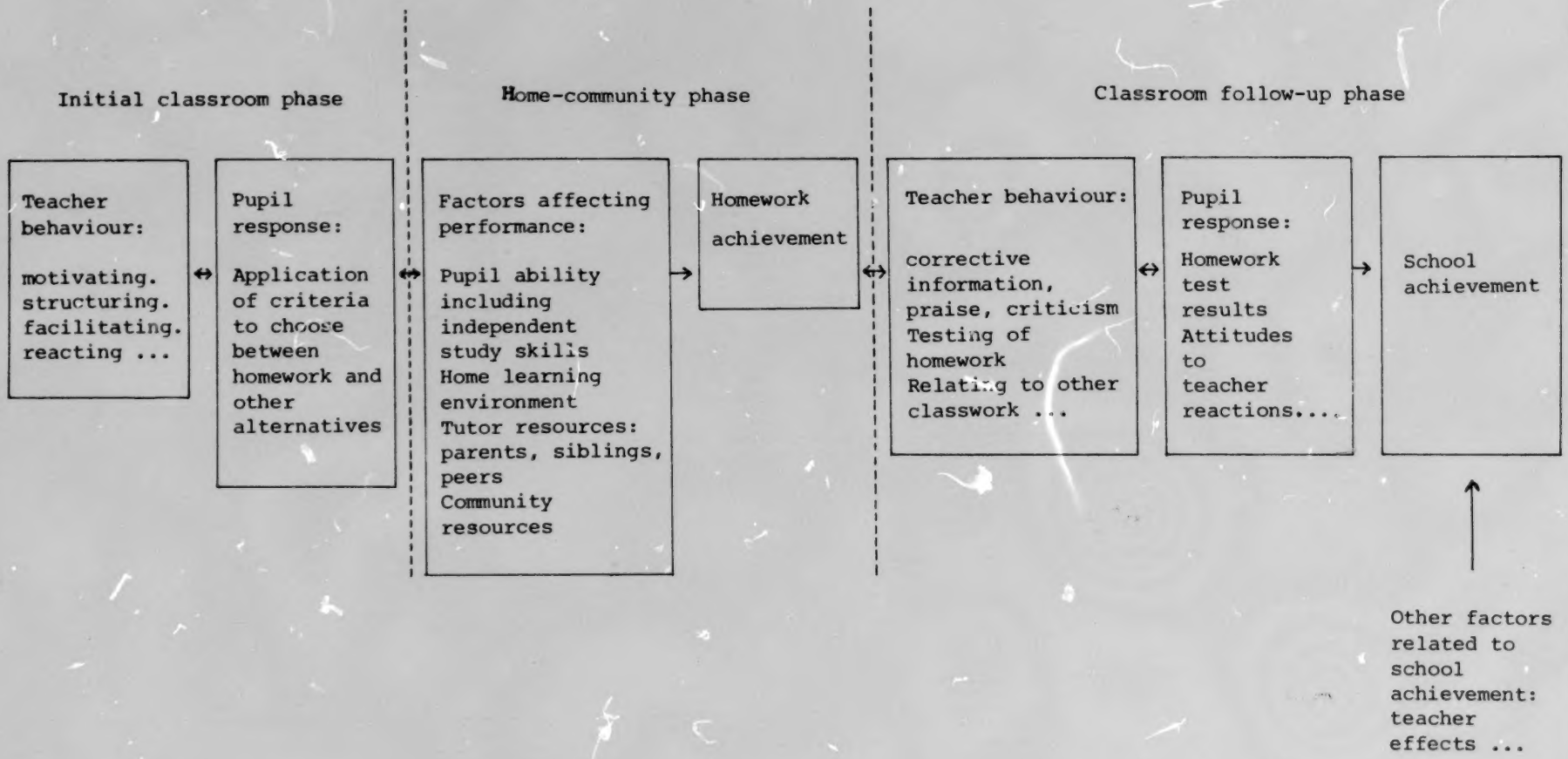

Fig.1. A model for homework research

attention is given to the first two phases of the model, namely the initial classroom phase in which teachers introduce and structure homework, and in the home-community phase, which involves a consideration of factors affecting homework performance once a student has chosen to participate. The research is therefore somewhat different from previous studies. In many ways it is a response to the comment of Strang (1960), who concluded that in the area of homework research there have been too many superficial surveys and inconclusive experimental studies, and that there is a need for accurate descriptions and evaluations of homework procedures used in particular contexts. The present research therefore aims to describe how teachers introduce and structure homework, and how pupils respond to the expectations of their teachers and under what conditions they are most likely to acquiesce. No attempt is made in the present study to evaluate pupils' response in terms of its quality or its effect on longer-term school achievement.

SUMMARY

This section of the report has reviewed the major research in the general area of homework. Any summary of the findings must be qualified by the observation that most studies have considered the area of mathematics. With that qualification, the following propositions emerge:

(1) Certain kinds of regularly assigned homework affect school achievement.

(2) Low-achieving groups in particular profit little from homework where initial concepts introduced in class are not understood.

(3) Exercises of an exploratory nature provide a useful intuitive base for new classwork.

(4) Revision exercises should preferably be spaced over time, especially for middle- and low-ability students, who are less able to meet the demands of more concentrated or mass review exercises.

(5) Students spend widely differing amounts of time on the same tasks. These findings emphasize the need to individualize homework according to differences in work-rates and independent study skills.

Even with these five propositions, fifty years of research on homework have yielded little information that might guide teachers or administrators in setting policy or in adopting strategies that will maximize pupil participation and commitment. The present research seeks a better understanding of those issues.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The aims of the research have been described as identifying factors associated with the participation in homework by middle secondary school pupils. This presented a complex set of questions about the importance for pupil involvement in homework of such factors as teachers' classroom behaviour at the introductory and follow-up stages of homework, the nature of the homework task itself, and the various influences from the home and peer group. Answers to these questions were sought through a variety of methods, including direct classroom observation, diary records, questionnaires, and interviews with pupils, teachers and parents in three Perth Government high schools. These schools are described in detail later in the report. They were not intended to be representative of all secondary schools, although they were selected on the grounds that each had certain characteristics relevant to pupils' participation in homework. Berry Mount, for example, contained a high proportion of pupils with backgrounds of lower socio-economic status (SES), and Cedar Brook was heavily represented by children of parents in professional and lower-professional occupations. The third school, Mill Town, was selected because it contained many pupils whose parents were immigrants who had arrived in Australia over the past thirty years. Because of language and other cultural differences it was expected that these parents might be less able to provide the kind of support and advice available to pupils whose parents had mastery of English and some familiarity with the Australian school system. The reasons for selecting the schools was therefore somewhat arbitrary but did include a concern for building into the study a wide range of social and ethnic contexts in which homework was carried out.

It could be argued that observations in only three schools would not provide a satisfactory basis from which to generalize, however well they represented the various factors relevant to homework. The position taken was that, while a broadly based survey would have advantages in that generalizations could be made from it, these advantages would be outweighed by the superficiality and lack of contextual data against which reported practices could be interpreted and evaluated.

THE STUDY OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN HOMEWORK

Grade level and subject areas investigated

Preliminary interviews were conducted with teachers and pupils in several Perth secondary schools other than those eventually included in the main study. The purpose of these interviews was to determine what teachers and pupils understood by the term homework and which issues they believed should be investigated in the later research. During that pilot work teachers and pupils were also asked which would be the most appropriate grade level to study. It was originally intended to investigate pupil participation in homework at the Year 8 level because that is the first year of secondary schooling in Western Australia and is a stage when independent study habits might be established. The preliminary interviews suggested that homework was not emphasized at the Year 8 level and that Year 9 would provide a more meaningful focus for the research.

Three Year 9 English, mathematics and social studies classes were selected for study in each of the three schools. The classes at Berry Mount and Mill Town were observed twice, and those at Cedar Brook were observed once, thus providing a total of forty-five observation studies, or "case studies". Classes in English and social studies were unstreamed, and mathematics classes were mainly graded on achievement. Classes were selected according to three criteria - willingness by the teachers to co-operate in the research; access within the school timetabling arrangements; and regular assignment of homework by the teachers concerned. The latter criterion was essential to ensure that classes in which homework was set would be studied. Resources and time did not permit the inclusion of science as one of the subjects of study. Direct observation by Hacker of forty-five lessons in Western Australian high schools* revealed that on only four occasions did teachers set homework. This finding was further validated by the present research*.

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* A diary survey of time spent on different subjects subsequently validated these findings. These findings are reported later in this report.

Table 1 indicates that in Berry Mount and Mill Town senior high schools each class was observed on two occasions when homework was set. In the case of Cedar Brook Senior High School, classes were observed on only one occasion. This was because Cedar Brook was the last of the three schools to be observed and many similarities (as well as some differences) were apparent between the response patterns of interviewees in that school and the two already observed.

Table 1. Homework participation: Frequency distribution of pupils involved in the case studies according to school and subject area. (N = 1 075 cases*)

School	Subject	Occasion 1	Occasion 2	Total
Berry Mount	English	70	56	126
	Maths	80	67	147
	S.studies	80	65	145
Mill Town	English	78	68	146
	Maths	87	71	158
	S.studies	76	66	142
Cedar Brook	English	53	(No second case studies)	53
	Maths	81		81
	S.studies	77		77
	Total:	682	393	1075

* 497 different pupils, i.e. some pupils were observed in more than one subject area, and some on both occasions.

The purpose of the case studies was to identify pupils who did the particular homework when it was set, and those who did not. This was done by the researcher being present at the time when the homework exercise was due and identifying those students who *had* and *had not* participated. All students were asked to answer a short questionnaire that sought general information about the student's age, sex, family background, and out-of-school activities.

Students who completed their homework then answered questions relating to the exercise they did. Those who did not do their homework answered a different set of questions relating to their reasons for not participating. (Appendix 1)

To assess the relevance of the context in which the homework was set and the importance of the teacher's behaviour when it was introduced, direct observations were made of the lessons from which the homework exercises arose. Notes were made of the teacher's comments relating to the importance of the homework exercise, its relevance to future work, and the location of resources. These observations of the in-school context represented an attempt to break down the artificial boundaries that previous research had established between what happens in and out of school.

Pupil interviews

To extend the investigation of the issues raised in the questionnaires, structured interviews (Appendix 2) were conducted with two of the pupils who had completed their homework and two who had not in each class *. A total of 147 pupil interviews were conducted in the manner illustrated in Table 2. These were actually 135 different students involved, but 12 were interviewed in both the first and second case studies, giving a total of 147 interviews.

To maximize the representativeness of the two groups interviewed (participants and non-participants) class teachers were asked to confirm that the pupils selected on the basis of their homework response were either regular participants or regular non-participants in homework for the subject concerned.

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* Table 2 indicates that fewer interviews were conducted on the second occasions. By that stage patterns of responses had been identified.

Table 2. Pupil interviews: Frequency distribution according to school, subject area and homework participation. (N = 147)

School	Subject	Occasion 1		Occasion 2		Total
		Partici-pants	N/Parti-cipants	Partici-pants	N/Partici cipants	
Berry Mount	English	7	6	4	4	21
	Maths	7	5	6	3	21
	S.studies	7	5	3	6	21
Mill Town	English	7	6	1	7	21
	Maths	8	4	4	6	22
	S.studies	9	3	2	7	21
Cedar Brook	English	4	1	(No second case studies)		5
	Maths	5	2			7
	S.studies	6	2			8
	Total:	60	34	20	33	147

Teacher interviews

In addition to the interviews with pupils, the pupils' teachers were interviewed (Appendix 3). This permitted some investigation of teachers' perceptions of the nature and purpose of the particular homework exercises, the kind of homework which they set most often, and their attitudes towards homework more generally. As these 27 teachers were drawn from those who regularly assigned homework, interviews were also conducted with a group of 10 teachers who were not involved with the 27 classes observed.

School administrator interviews

Interviews were conducted with the principals, their deputies and senior subject teachers in each school. The aim was to identify official policy on homework so that some assessment could be made of staff's awareness and implementation of that policy.

Parent interviews

Interviews were also conducted with parents of students who had been identified either as regular homework participants or as regular non-participants. The scope of the study permitted a total of only 30 parent interviews across the three schools (Table 3). The interview schedule used in the parent interviews is presented in Appendix 4 .

Because parents' attitudes and homework-related behaviour might vary from one child to another within the same family, the interviews focused upon the child who had been observed in the school setting rather than upon the family generally.

Table 3. Parent interviews : Frequency distribution according to school and participation. (N - 30)

School	Parents of participants	Parents of Non-Participants	Total
Berry Mount	5	5	10
Mill Town	8	2	10
Cedar Brook	7	3	10
Total:	20	10	30

STUDY OF THE AMOUNT OF TIME STUDENTS SPEND ON HOMEWORK

A second aspect of the research focused on the time students spend on homework. This was a related but different question to that relating to participation. This is because students may always participate, but spend little time on homework because it is seldom set, or because they are fast workers. Indeed, some pupils spend hours on exercises that other students dispense with in a very little time. This aspect of the research therefore exposed the magnitude of the variation in the time that students spend on homework by virtue of differences in teachers' expectations, the speed at which the work was done, or the demands of the various combinations of subjects taken.

A random sample of approximately 20 per cent of the pupils enrolled in the three schools was asked to complete a homework diary for one week (Appendix 5). This section of the research was extended beyond Year 9 to all grade levels from Years 8 to 11*. This allowed Year 9 to be placed in the context of the rest of the secondary school and permitted comparison to be made between the demands of the different grade levels. The scope of the research was also extended at this point to include an additional school. Newton, an independent Catholic secondary school, was included for purposes of comparison with the three Government high schools. It was located close to Cedar Brook, drew on a similar high SES population, but had a 15 per cent intake of students of Italian parentage.

The amount of time spent on homework in each subject was recorded together with relevant background information such as levels of achievement in each subject, parents' occupation, and the pupil's intended career. Appendix 6 shows that the diary used by Year 11 students was of a slightly different format to allow for the wider range of subject combinations at that level. The diaries were kept during mid-September, a typical month in the sense that pupils were following a usual homework pattern rather than preparing for mid-year or final examinations.

The number of students surveyed is reported in Table 4. Because a wide range was anticipated in the amount of time spent on homework, a relatively large pupil sample was selected to ensure an adequate representation of pupil groups in all the homework time categories.

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* Year 12 excluded because of TAE examination preparation.

Table 4. Homework time survey: Frequency distribution of students surveyed according to school and year level. (N = 858)

School	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total
Berry Mount	84	90	76	-	250
Mill Town	71	82	86	-	239
Cedar Brook	38	49	53	29	169
Newton	46	57	42	55	200
Total:	239	278	257	84	858

Some limitations of the research

Although three months were spent in each of the three schools, two researchers could gain only a limited understanding of the complexity of the social and educational factors associated with homework participation. In this sense the term "case study" may be somewhat misleading because it connotes a picture of rich and complete data, which may be more true of single subject studies than of the present study, which collected data on large numbers of students and teachers in the selected schools.

The researchers also had to be selective about the pupils, teachers, administrators and parents interviewed. However, such selection was made as systematically as possible. The length of contact with interviewees was also limited to one or two half-hour interviews and this gave little time to establish the trust and openness that is so essential when probing into the sensitive issues that impinge upon pupils' participation in home study. An attempt was made to break down pupils' reticence by interviewing on two different occasions and by emphasizing that the interviewer

was not a teacher. The second interviews provided more information than the first, when some pupils tended to be awed by the situation and to speak in generalities. They also yielded more detailed anecdotal information, which validated both the questionnaire data and the more generalized perceptions recorded in the first interviews.

Conclusion

The results of any research are no more valid than the methods used to obtain them. This section of the report has therefore described the sample sizes and the procedures used to collect information in order that the findings reported in subsequent sections may be evaluated accordingly.

Chapter 4

THE SCHOOLS*

The three schools studied were Mill Town, Berry Mount and Cedar Brook senior high schools. It was observed in the preceding section that these were not assumed to be typical of all schools but rather to contain children from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds so that a wide range of pupil, teacher and parent behaviours and attitudes relating to homework could be illustrated.

The following profiles illustrate sharp social contrasts between the schools. It is emphasized that, although Cedar Brook and Berry Mount were chosen because of their characteristic populations, they do not represent opposite ends of a socio-economic continuum.

Teachers in each of these schools acknowledge problems of different kinds, but it was the *range* of problems and their causes, set against the social background of the schools and their environments, that prompted their selection for the study.

A final introductory comment is that the three pseudonyms may give little anonymity to the schools involved. The profiles necessarily give geographic referents and the schools are possibly readily identifiable by anyone familiar with the school system concerned. Anonymity is a condition which is virtually impossible to preserve within case-study research, particularly in a relatively small school system. It creates a problem in the later sections of the report where straightforward description of practices may be translated or interpreted by the reader as evaluative comment. The latter is the prerogative of the reader but judgements were not intended by the researchers. They perceived their task to be that of reporting observations and not of evaluating practices.

Mill Town Senior High School

Mill Town is seven kilometres from the city centre and is located in a residential area with predominantly privately owned

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* As Newton was involved only in the small upper school diary survey it is not described in detail here. See p.22 for a brief description of Newton.

or privately rented property. It is separated from the major road system by an adjacent institution and is remote from traffic noise. The standard of housing in the major contributory suburb is considered to be "desirable".

There are six local primary schools that contribute to the student population of Mill Town. The social composition of the areas in which these primary schools are located varies. While several draw from middle-class catchment areas, two in particular are situated in high-density areas, with relatively old and, in some cases, sub-standard housing, which tends to be privately rented by migrant or Aboriginal families, and by low-income groups. The area generally does not have much State Housing property, but there are pockets of these dwellings.

Mill Town Senior High draws its students from a socially heterogeneous population, but professional, managerial a d self-employed groups together with skilled trades are quite strongly represented. There is little industry in the area and this in part explains why it is considered to be a desirable residential area.

The school is a two-storeyed brick building erected in 1956. It has a student population of over 1 200 and a teacher population of 85 (as at March, 1979). The school is one of three in the metropolitan area that are classed as special language schools, offering four languages through to Year 12. This means that the school, like its location, is considered to be highly desirable and draws students from outside its catchment area. The selection of these students is by examination and those selected tend to have high aspirations and ability, and to have parents with similar aspirations for them.

One of the striking features of the Mill Town school is its high migrant population. A survey carried out recently by the school revealed that parents of students enrolled were born in 51 different countries. Forty-three percent of students had both parents foreign born and in 30 per cent of cases a foreign language only was spoken at home. As further illustration

of this fact, a survey carried out in all Government schools to determine the number and origin of "migrant children"* revealed that at Mill Town High School there were 594 such children. The predominant countries of parents' origin were Italy (211), Greece (102), Yugoslavia (42) and Burma (24). The "migrant children" group represents 52 per cent of the student population. The majority of these students were defined as needing no special assistance in school. However, the effect of cultural background on the students' achievement, especially in the context of home learning, could be quite significant. Possible lack of parental assistance and different cultural values could be major determinants of students' response to and performance in homework tasks.

High proportions of the school population were defined as migrant at each of the five year-levels (Table 5). In Year 9 eighteen of the 143 migrant students were identified by teachers as having poor oral proficiency and as being weak in reading, comprehension and written expression, or orally proficient but weak in the other areas. They are given special instruction in a special class. The remainder are integrated into the normal classes and receive no special assistance.

Table 5. Children of migrant parents in Mill Town schools by grade level. (N = 594)

Year Level	N	% of total population for grade level
8	135	51
9	143	52
10	139	51
11	103	53
12	75	52
Total	594	

* "Migrant child" is defined as a child, one or both of whose parents predominantly speak a language other than English. A breakdown of the distribution of migrant children by grade level is presented in Table 5.

Berry Mount Senior High School

Berry Mount Senior High is also about seven kilometres from the city centre. It provides an interesting contrast with Mill Town School, being in close proximity to light industrial estates containing warehouses and manufacturing complexes. Moreover, the school site is on one of the link roads to the highways, which means that, unlike Mill Town, heavy traffic passes by the school constantly.

Again, unlike Mill Town school, Berry Mount is located in an area with a very high proportion of State Housing Commission dwellings. Several of the contributory suburbs were built entirely as State Housing Commission areas. A study carried out in 1975* indicated that over 93 per cent of the houses in the suburb of Berry Mount were owned by the State Housing Commission. This is not typical of the whole contributory area, but the proportion of rented property in the wider area is considered to be higher than average.

The school, a single-storey design built in 1955, has a student population of nearly eleven hundred and a teaching staff of eighty-one. It is generally accepted by the staff and the State Education authorities that the school buildings are no longer adequate. Plans have already been prepared for its replacement and it is hoped that the new Berry Mount school will be operational within the next few years.

Berry Mount does not have such a strikingly high migrant population.** Using the same survey material as used for Mill Town, the migrant children at Berry Mount comprised only 5 per cent of the school population, with France, Germany and Italy the predominant countries of origin.

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* Unpublished report: Donovan, R.J., & Associates on behalf of S.H.C. and Australian Housing Research Council, 1975.

** Migrant here is used in the same sense as on page 27.

Cedar Brook Senior High School

Cedar Brook is a modern high school located in one of Perth's more affluent coastal suburbs about nine kilometres from the city centre. The school adjoins bushland and residential areas. Its site is elevated and overlooks the nearby ocean. Compared with the other two schools Cedar Brook is small with only 600 pupils and 40 teachers. Six years ago it had a peak enrolment of over 800 pupils. With Mill Town it shares a special interest in the teaching of foreign languages, but its students are predominantly of British descent. The school is a modern single-storeyed design surrounded by well-tended lawns and trees.

The catchment area of the school is mainly a middle-class residential area, although some 20 per cent of the student population is drawn from a State Housing area several kilometres from the school. The land values in the area have been high since its original development in the early 1960s, and are four times as high as those in the area adjacent to Berry Mount.

The school has few students classified as migrants (29) and, in the Education Department survey referred to earlier in this section, only four were classified as having significant language problems.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE SCHOOLS

The picture so far is of Mill Town with its high migrant population and special attributes as a language school and somewhat heterogeneous social content; of Berry Mount, which in contrast is located in a light industrial area, drawing its students largely from State Housing suburbs; and of the smaller Cedar Brook, which draws its students from a predominantly middle-class residential area. A comparison of the socio-economic status of the pupils in terms of Broome's (1969) seven-point classification of breadwinner's occupation is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Socio-economic status of the three schools.** (N=497)

Socio-economic status group	Berry Mount	Mill Town	Cedar Brook
	%	%	%
1 Upper and lower professionals	3	14	18
2 Managers, administrators and self-employed	6	12	20
3 Clerical, real estate and insurance workers	10	12	12
4 Skilled craftsmen	18	14	14
5 Sales assistants, semi-skilled and transport workers	27	13	14
6 Unskilled labourers and domestic workers	17	21	10
7 Inadequately defined and unpaid domestic workers	19	14	12
TOTAL	100	100	100

The data in Table 6 illustrate the earlier comments concerning the social contexts of the schools. They reveal that at Mill Town all sectors of the social spectrum are represented. It also shows that Berry Mount draws on a larger number of low SES families with 66 per cent of pupils from the three lowest groups, and that Cedar Brook draws 64 per cent from the three highest groups.

These three schools together provide a context of diverse social and ethnic pupil backgrounds within which the present homework study was carried out. The potential relevance of these ethnic and social differences is clear. Ethnic background is important to the extent that communication between pupils, parents and the school may be inhibited by cultural and language differences.

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* Local Government rates department estimate.

** The data are based on a random sample taken in each school fixed to yield data within the 95 per cent confidence limit.

Similarly, SES differences may be relevant to the extent that they may be associated with differences in attitudes toward schooling, the amount of support available to the child outside the school and the physical context in which homework is done.

Chapter 5

YEAR 9 PUPILS' RESPONSES TO HOMEWORK

Pupils' response rates for homework in the three subject areas were determined by counting the number who completed set exercises and the number who did not. All pupils completed questionnaires (Appendix 1) designed to obtain school and family background information, and attitudes to the homework exercises concerned. In addition, pupils who completed their homework answered questions about the time they spent, the help received, and difficulties encountered. Those who did not do their homework were asked why, and what were their attitudes to the particular exercise. This section provides a summary of the questionnaire responses. Its principal concerns are to report:

(1) the school and family characteristics of the Year 9 pupils involved and the amounts of time they committed to out-of-school activities;

(2) the homework participation rates in the three subjects concerned, and school and family background factors associated with those participation rates;

(3) the conditions under which homework was done; and

(4) the reasons pupils gave for not completing homework.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PUPILS

The 497 students had a mean age of 14.6 years (s. d. 0.62) and 53 per cent were males. Table 7 shows that the socio-economic backgrounds of the pupils varied considerably between the three schools. The four SES groups were derived from the nine occupational prestige categories described in Behrens, N., *Schooling and Work*, Commission of Inquiry into Policy and Education Series, Australian Government Printing Office, 1978, p.124. The nine categories were simplied as follows: (High (1-4), professional,

managerial; medium (5), clerical, armed services, police; medium-low (6), craftsmen and foremen; and low (7-9), service workers and unskilled labourers. Students were classified on the basis of father's occupation except where the father was deceased or not living at home. In these cases, the mother's occupation was used.

Children from families in the higher SES groups were more strongly represented at Cedar Brook, with almost two-thirds of the students in that school from homes in the highest category. In contrast, two-thirds of the Berry Mount students were from families represented in the two lower SES categories. These extremes were not present at Mill Town, where pupils were fairly evenly distributed over all categories. (See Table 6).

Table 7. Year 9 : Percentage distribution of pupils according to SES background and school. (N = 497)

SES background	Berry Mount	Mill Town	Cedar Brook
High	19.0	33.8	64.2
Medium	13.7	13.4	13.8
Medium/Low	26.2	24.2	10.1
Low	41.1	28.7	11.9
Total per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8 indicates the widely different ethnic backgrounds of the pupils in the three schools. Forty-nine per cent of Mill Town students reported that their father's country of origin was either European or Asian, compared with only 14 per cent in both Berry Mount and Cedar Brook. A similar distribution was reported for the mother's country of origin. These differences were reflected in the language the children said was spoken in their homes. Twenty-seven per cent of Mill Town students reported that English was not the main language, compared with only 2.5 per cent for Berry Mount and 1 per cent for Cedar Brook.

Table 8. Year 9 : Percentage distribution of pupils according to parents' country of origin and school. (N = 497)

Parents' country of origin		Berry Mount	Mill Town	Cedar Brook
Mother	Australia	60.6	35.9	72.8
	UK-US	22.8	14.2	18.4
	Europe	8.3	39.5	6.1
	Asia	5.7	7.6	1.8
	Other	2.6	2.7	.9
Total per cent		100.0	100.0	100.0
Father	Australia	58.8	32.2	66.3
	UK-US	24.7	15.6	19.5
	Europe	9.8	42.2	13.3
	Asia	4.6	7.8	.9
	Other	2.1	2.2	.0
Total per cent		100.0	100.0	100.0

Because homework competes for time with other out-of-school activities, students were asked how much time they committed to after-school sport, part-time jobs and home duties. Table 9 shows that these students averaged a little over four hours' sport during the week and over three and a half hours in the week-end, although a very wide range of commitment is indicated by the large standard deviations. Most spent more time viewing television on one evening than on sport over the total week. Fifty-three per cent of the group reported that they averaged up to three hours or more television on each week-night. (Table 10).

Table 9. Year 9 : Average time per week for out-of-school commitments other than homework. (N = 497)

Activity	Mean (hours)	s.d.
Weekday sport	4.2	4.2
Weekend sport	3.6	4.8
Home duties	3.9	3.5

In addition to the commitments listed in Table 9, 65 students averaged seven and a half hours in paid jobs during the week (s.d. 6.9) and 61 students averaged 4.9 hours paid work over the week-end (s.d. 3.9).

Table 10. Year 9 : Percentage distribution of pupils according to TV viewing time on week-nights. (N - 497)

Hours	per cent	f
0	3.9	19
0 - 1	13.9	69
1 - 2	29.3	145
2 - 3	20.0	104
Over 3 hours	32.5	160
Total	100.0	497

Table 11 provides a clearer picture of the total commitments of these students. It confirms the wide range in the time that students commit to various activities after school. Twenty-one per cent have a weekly commitment of over twenty hours for sport, jobs, and work around the home, and a further 22.7 per cent have fewer than five hours. Students are therefore very differently placed concerning the time they have available for home study.

Table 11. Year 9 : Percentage distribution according to total out-of-school commitments other than homework. (N = 497)

Total amount of time spent on sport, jobs and home duties.	Per cent	f
20 hours per week or more	21.3	106
15 - 20 hours	14.5	72
10 - 15 hours	17.1	85
5 - 10 hours	24.3	121
0 - 5 hours	22.7	113
Total	100.0	497

Finally, Table 12 shows how much time students said they averaged on homework each week-night and over the week-end. It is noted that the question of how much *time* is devoted to homework is a related but different question from whether students *participate* when homework is set. Some students may comply with all requests to do homework, but record relatively low times, either because they are fast workers or because their teachers do not often set homework. The frequencies reported in Table 12 are therefore useful only in the sense of contributing to the picture of students' total out-of-school commitments. Table 12 shows that for many of these Year 9 students, homework was not a major time commitment compared with other out-of-school activities such as television-viewing. Six per cent reported that they never did any homework during the week and a further 54 per cent reported that they did *up to* one hour per week-night. While a higher proportion (18 per cent) did no homework in the week-end, 24 per cent reported an average of more than two hours' over the week-end.

Table 12. Year 9 : Percentage distribution of students according to time spent on homework

Hours	Week-day (N - 491)*		Week-end (N = 489)	
	Per cent	f	Per cent	f
0	6.1	30	18.4	90
0 - 1	54.4	267	31.2	153
1 - 2	31.4	154	26.4	129
Over 2	8.1	40	24.0	117
Total	100.0	491	100.0	489

* Discrepancy from 497 owing to missing data.

HOMEWORK PARTICIPATION RATES

Participation and school achievement level

Tables 13 to 15 show the participation rates in each subject according to pupils' achievement levels recorded at the mid-year examinations. The six levels of achievement range from Advanced Credit (high) through to Basic Pass (low).

Overall, the participation rate for English was 57.2 per cent, for social studies 92.8 per cent, and for mathematics 80.6 per cent. These levels of participation may be spuriously high because low achievers, who tended not to comply, were set little homework. The overall frequencies of low achievers for all subjects were low. This also meant that any links between achievement level and participation were difficult to establish. However, there was a slight trend in the direction of lower participation rates among lower achievers, particularly in English, although this trend was not consistent.

It is worth noting that, while overall participation rates were quite high, students' responses to questions concerning what they had learnt from the exercises were salutory (Appendix 1, Part B, Question 7). The proportion of students who stated that they had learnt nothing from the exercises were 52 per cent for English, 32 per cent for social studies, and 41 per cent

for mathematics. These responses are of particular concern because this widespread feeling that much homework has little value was confirmed by subsequent interviews, which were also unstructured and allowed for complete freedom of pupil response.

Participation and sex differences

There were no significant differences in the level of participation of boys and girls in any of the three subject areas. In English there was a slight trend in the direction of a higher participation rate by girls, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 13. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to English homework participation and school achievement level.*

School	Achievement	Participated	Did not Participate
Berry Mount	Adv. C.P.	0 (0)	0 (0)
	P.	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Int. C.P.	9 (5)	2 (3)
	P.	29 (18)	19 (23)
	Basic C.P.	6 (2)	3 (3)
	P.	0 (0)	2 (2)
	Total	44 (25)	26 (31)
Mill Town	Adv. C.P.	11 (12)	2 (1)
	P.	9 (10)	4 (2)
	Int. C.P.	9 (14)	15 (8)
	P.	6 (6)	9 (7)
	Basic C.P.	2 (1)	4 (2)
	P	1 (0)	6 (5)
	Total	38 (43)	40 (25)
Cedar Brook	Adv. C.P.	7	0
	P.	12	0
	Int. C.P.	12	4
	P.	5	10
	Basic C.P.	0	2
	P.	0	1
	Total	36	17
	Total	118 (68)	83 (56)

* Occasion 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

Table 14. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to social studies homework participation and school achievement level.*

	Achievement	Participated	Did not participate
Berry Mount	Adv. C.P.	0 (0)	0 (0)
	P.	6 (5)	1 (1)
	Int. C.P.	12 (8)	2 (3)
	P.	21 (17)	9 (10)
	Basic C.P.	8 (4)	8 (7)
	P.	3 (6)	10 (4)
	Total	50 (40)	30 (25)
Mill Town	Adv. C.P.	4 (4)	1 (1)
	P.	4 (6)	2 (0)
	Int. C.P.	20 (20)	7 (4)
	Basic C.P.	10 (7)	2 (3)
	P.	4 (1)	1 (1)
	Total	54 (50)	22 (16)
Cedar Brook	Adv. C.P.	18	0
	P.	10	3
	Int. CC.P.	27	2
	P.	11	1
	Basic C.P.	3	0
	P.	2	0
	Total	71	6
	Total	175 (90)	58 (41)

* Occasion 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

Table 15. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to mathematics homework participation and school achievement level.*

School	Achievement	Participated	Did not participate.
Berry Mount	Adv. C.P.	8 (8)	3 (1)
	P.	10 (11)	4 (0)
	Int.** C.P.	20 (13)	4 (8)
	P.	24 (24)	6 (1)
	Basic C.P.	1 (1)	0 (0)
	P.	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Total	63 (57)	17 (10)
Mill Town	Adv. C.P.	13 (12)	6 (4)
	P.	10 (14)	13 (9)
	Int. C.P.	4 (2)	3 (0)
	P.	33 (24)	4 (5)
	Basic C.P.	1 (0)	0 (1)
	P.	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Total	61 (52)	26 (19)
Cedar Brook	Adv. C.P.	24	0
	P.	14	0
	Int. C.P.	21	2
	P.	13	1
	Basic C.P.	6	0
	P	0	0
	Total	78	3
	Total	202 (109)	46 (29)

* Case study 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

** To enable direct comparison with earlier tables, no differentiation has been made at the Intermediate level between Ordinary and Elementary levels.

Participation and SES background**

It is sometimes asserted that SES background is a factor associated with homework participation, and that children from lower SES

** Discrepancies between total frequencies reported in Tables 13-15 and Tables 16-18 arise from missing SES background data.

backgrounds often do not enjoy home environments or family support structures that encourage participation in home study. This may be true in some contexts, but Tables 16 to 18 show that the relationship between pupils' SES backgrounds and homework participation was not strong **, except in the case of English, where non-participants in the lowest SES group outnumbered participants in each school. The overall observation is that the participation rates were generally high and that there were significant numbers of children at *every* SES level who did not do their homework.

Table 16. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to English homework participation and SES background.*

School	SES	Participated		Did not participate.	
Berry Mount	High	9	(5)	2	(6)
	Medium	7	(4)	4	(4)
	Medium/low	13	(4)	5	(7)
	Low	12	(10)	16	(14)
	Total	41	(23)	27	(31)
Mill Town	High	14	(17)	12	(5)
	Medium	8	(9)	4	(2)
	Medium/low	5	(5)	7	(5)
	Low	9	(12)	14	(9)
	Total	36	(43)	37	(21)
Cedar Brook	High	25		6	
	Medium	5		2	
	Medium/Low	1		2	
	Low	4		6	
	Total	35		16	
	Total	112	(66)	80	(52)

* Case study 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

** Not statistically significant.

Table 17. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to social studies homework participation and SES background.*

School	SES	Participated	Did not participate
Berry Mount	High	9 (8)	6 (4)
	Medium	5 (2)	1 (1)
	Medium/Low	12 (10)	6 (6)
	Low	20 (14)	14 (10)
	Total	46 (34)	27 (21)
Mill Town	High	12 (12)	6 (5)
	Medium	9 (9)	0 (0)
	Medium/Low	10 (12)	6 (6)
	Low	16 (11)	7 (8)
	Total	47 (44)	19 (19)
Cedar Brook	High	46	5
	Medium	8	1
	Medium/Low	7	0
	Low	10	0
	Total	71	6
	Total	164 (78)	52 (40)

* Case study 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

Table 18. Year 9 : Frequency distribution of students according to mathematics homework participation and SES background.*

School	SES	Participated	Did not participate.
Berry Mount	High	15 (13)	3 (2)
	Medium	8 (5)	1 (1)
	Medium/Low	15 (20)	7 (2)
	Low	19 (18)	5 (3)
	Total	57 (56)	16 (8)
Mill Town	High	18 (15)	9 (8)
	Medium	5 (9)	3 (1)
	Medium/Low	17 (13)	5 (4)
	Low	15 (12)	6 (4)
	Total	55 (49)	23 (17)
Cedar Brook	High	50	2
	Medium	13	0
	Medium/Low	8	0
	Low	8	0
	Total	79	2
	Total	191 (105)	41 (25)

* Case study 2 in parenthesis. No second case was conducted at Cedar Brook.

53

The relatively weak relationship between socio-economic background and homework participation may come as no surprise. Perth has its pockets of poverty, but it does not contain those social extremes that are characteristic of large urban centres in the United Kingdom and North America, or even in Sydney and Melbourne. The socio-economic factor, therefore, may not, as far as the school is concerned, be as powerful an influence in Perth as it is elsewhere. Some support for this view derives from the responses of the children from the various SES background groups to questions relating to their home study environments. Approximately 90 per cent of students from all SES groups reported that they were able to do their homework in a place that was comfortable and where they were able to concentrate. Moreover, approximately 90 per cent of students from all SES groups reported that their mothers were very concerned about their doing homework. The reported level of concern of fathers was lower, but this was because over 10 per cent were not present in the home, compared with only 1.8 per cent of mothers. There were slight differences in the direction of greater parental concern within the higher SES groups, but the overall picture is one of concern within all social categories.

Participation and teacher behaviour

Teacher behaviour is a factor that cannot be overlooked in a consideration of pupils' homework participation rates. A thorough assessment of the importance of teachers' behaviour would be a major research project in itself. However, within the scope of this exploratory study, 27 teachers were observed in lessons in which they set homework and subsequently when they followed it up. The observer noted the teachers' behaviour as it related to explaining the purpose of the exercise, the location of any relevant resources, and the manner in which it was to be followed up. Relationships between teachers' behaviour and pupil participation rates were subsequently checked. Certain teacher behaviours were consistently related to low participation rates across each of the three subject areas.

The first of these behaviours was what is best described as *vagueness*, exemplified by exercises such as :

> "Using newspapers as your source write a paragraph about what seem to be the community's attitudes towards Aboriginals and their problems." (Social studies, 55 per cent*)

and

> "Using an established story, write a plan for a fairy story or a play and have it ready as a rough copy tomorrow." (English, 40 per cent)

and

> "I want you to read *I Can Jump Puddles*. You have one month to read the book. I'll give you some discussion questions in the meantime. The first is to find out all you can about poliomyelitis so you can discuss it on Wednesday." (English, 36 per cent)

Although the substance of assignments such as these may be intrinsically interesting and valuable, each lacks clarity concerning length, location of resources, and pupil accountability. Pupil participation rates were consistently low for assignments introduced in this manner. The last exercise relating to poliomyelitis was also of a *preparatory* nature. Students invariably reacted to such exercises with indifference, except where there was also a strong measure of accountability.

In contrast teacher *clarity* was associated with high participation rates :

> "Quickly turn to the homework sheet (mimeographed and headed Homework Wednesday July 11 or July 12). These are revision questions on factorization that we did on Monday. If anyone wasn't here then they can stop behind after the lesson and I'll quickly run through it with them during recess. I'll collect them tomorrow." (Mathematics, 86 per cent)

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* Subject area and participation rate.

This mathematics teacher and several others maintained *routines* in which homework sheets were handed out on the same days each week and regularly collected on the following days. Homework routines like this had been learnt by students and were associated with higher participation rates ranging from 85 per cent to 100 per cent in five mathematic classes and one of the English classes. Apart from the routine character of the above factorization exercise, the teacher stated the purpose (revision), ensured that everybody including absentees knew how to do the exercise, and made the checking procedures clear. This approach contrastssharply with the homework exercise set at the end of a noisy social studies class, in which the students were writing a paragraph on government policy :

> "Who's finished pages 40 and 41? (No hands were raised.) Right (somewhat apologetically). I want all of you to finish 40 and 41 for homework for tomorrow". (He wrote "pages 40 to 41 for homework" on the blackboard, but few students seemed to note it).
> (Social studies, 52 per cent)

The lack of firmness and purpose with which this exercise was set was paralleled by the teacher's cursory check the following day when he glanced at half of the efforts, but quickly abandoned the follow-up because of mounting noise. Only half did the exercise, but apparently all knew that the penalties for non-participation were minimal.

Lack of clarity was also observed in a Year 8 mathematics class that had been working on imperial and metric units. The class had been doing ten questions and the teacher then blackboarded a note instructing them to finish those and five more. He then said:

> "Find out what perimeter is, what real-life situations you would need to find perimeter for, and list a few examples. That's your homework. (He pointed to the metric questions.) Do the questions on perimeter too, because that's our next topic. Our next arithmetic lesson is on Friday so I'll collect them then."
> (Mathematics, 46 per cent)

The teacher did *not* collect the work and the low participation rate could be interpreted in the light of the students' prior knoledge that he seldom checked. However, the low response rate may also have been associated with the fact that half the exercise was announced *verbally* as a preparatory assignment out of the context of the work of that particular lesson.

These few examples illustrate the contrasts in different teachers' behaviour as they set and check homework. They suggest that pupils are more likely to participate if teachers plan homework as an *integral part* of a particular lesson or sequence of lessons, rather than in a form which often presents itself as a hasty and poorly organized after-thought. Such planning is more likely to produce the necessary clear statement of purpose, relevance, resource location and method of follow-up. Clarity was greatly strengthened by *visual* blackboard, textual or mimeographed presentation of the exercises, especially as many of the assignments were introduced in the noisy finishing-off phase of the lessons, when pupil motivation had waned.

The significance of the motivational properties of teachers' behaviour should not be underestimated. Teachers who were unsuccessful in obtaining high participation rates often failed to motivate students because they did not emphasize the *intrinsic* value in terms of relevance, challenge and interest, or the more *extrinsic* value in terms of rewards and sanctions. In the long term teachers may best emphasize homework's extrinsic value by regularly collecting, marking and recording homework performance, and by informing pupils and their parents that such records are an important basis for diagnosis of learning difficulties, and evaluation of effort and achievement.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH HOMEWORK WAS DONE

Students were asked to describe the physical context in which they did their homework (Appendix 1, Question 3). The question was unstructured and only 367 of the 497 students provided usable information. Table 19 indicates that the vast majority of students

reported that they had a comfortable, quiet place in which to do homework. Predictably there were slight differences in favour of the higher SES groups and it is of concern that some 15 per cent of students in the two lowest SES groups reported that they did not have a place where they could concentrate, compared with 7 per cent for the two higher SES groups. The distraction most frequently mentioned by students of all SES groups was television.

Table 19. Year 9 : Percentage of students reporting favourable home environments according to SES background. (N = 497)

Conditions	High	Medium	Med/Low	Low
Homework place is comfortable	88.3	88.0	87.2	88.2
Able to concentrate in homework place	92.7	93.9	84.8	87.4
Mother cares a lot about homework	92.3	86.2	84.8	81.0
Father cares a lot about homework	77.4	77.5	67.7	70.0

Table 20 shows that most children do not receive any regular help with their homework. Fathers and older brothers and sisters were the major *regular* helpers in mathematics, although this was the case for only 15 per cent of students. Significantly, however, over one-third of the students mentioned that they *sometimes* sought help from fathers, mothers, and older siblings. This suggests that the *availability* of support in the home is important for most students, even though it is not always sought. Mothers were a more important point of reference in English, being mentioned by 15 per cent as helping *always* or *often*, and by a further 41 per cent as helping *sometimes*, which again indicates the importance of the availability of help or consultation when it is needed. Similar patterns of assistance existed in social studies and science, although mothers tended to be a more important point of reference in social studies.

Finally, a dominant factor in many students' homework environments was television. Thirty-nine per cent did their homework away from television, 45 per cent reported that they sometimes watched television while doing homework, and 16 per cent often or always combined homework with television.

Table 20. Year 9 : Percentage frequencies of homework help received. (N - 497)

Helper	Subject	Frequency of help					
		Always	Often	Some-times	Never	Not present	Total %
Mother	Maths	3.0	5.0	36.9	54.0	(1.1)	100.0
	English	3.2	11.9	40.8	43.0		100.0
	Soc.st.	2.2	8.5	38.2	50.0		100.0
	Science	2.7	6.0	23.7	66.6		100.0
Father	Maths	5.0	11.3	38.0	38.6	(7.6)	100.0
	English	1.8	6.5	24.5	59.5		100.0
	Soc.st.	1.8	8.3	28.3	54.0		100.0
	Science	2.9	7.2	28.7	53.6		100.0
Brother or Sister	Maths	2.9	12.5	35.6	47.9	(1.1)	100.0
	English	1.2	5.1	25.4	67.0		100.0
	Soc.st.	1.4	3.9	29.3	64.2		100.0
	Science	1.4	6.3	31.9	59.3		100.0
Other class members	Maths	.9	5.7	50.2	43.0	(.2)	100.0
	English	.2	4.5	38.7	56.3		100.0
	Soc.st.	.7	4.0	43.4	51.7		100.0
	Science	1.2	4.4	42.9	51.3		100.0
Other friends	Maths	.7	4.9	35.2	59.0	(.2)	100.0
	English	1.1	3.9	25.0	69.7		100.0
	Soc.st.	.7	3.4	27.1	68.5		100.0
	Science	.9	3.0	27.8	68.1		100.0
Teachers	Maths	5.9	15.7	50.2	28.0		100.0
	English	5.5	12.6	43.7	38.0		100.0
	Soc.st.	6.4	13.8	45.6	34.0		100.0
	Science	5.4	13.9	45.2	35.3		100.0

PUPILS' REASONS FOR COMPLETING OR NOT COMPLETING HOMEWORK

Pupils were asked why they did not complete their homework (Appendix 1, Part B, Question 1). Their reasons varied among the three subjects. In English, the most common reasons were that the topic was not interesting, that there was too much other homework, or that

books were left at school. In social studies the three most common reasons were the unavailability of reference books, failure to understand how to proceed, and lack of interest in the topic. In the case of mathematics, the single most common reason was that there was too much other homework.

Table 21 indicates that for each subject students were more likely to do homework if they expected that their teachers would check it. In English only 4 per cent of the homework participants expected that homework would not be checked, compared with 17 per cent of the non-participants. In social studies only 8.5 per cent of the participants expected that it would not be checked, compared with 26 per cent of the non-participants, and in mathematics 18.5 per cent of the participants expected no checking, compared with 35.5 per cent of the non-participants. This indicates that teachers should make their students accountable if they expect them to comply with homework demands.

Table 21. Year 9 : Percentage distribution according to homework participation and expectation of homework being checked. (N = 1075)

Subject	Students' expectation for teacher checking						
	Definitely not check	Probably not check	Don't Know	Probably Check	Definitely check	Total %	N
English							
Did homework	-	4.0	1.3	37.3	57.3	100	186
Didn't do homework	1.7	1.7	13.3	45.0	38.3	100	139
Soc. studies							
Did homework	-	2.1	6.4	37.2	54.3	100	265
Didn't do homework	5.1	10.3	10.3	38.2	36.2	100	99
Mathematics							
Did homework	-	4.2	14.3	29.4	52.1	100	311
Didn't do homework	-	16.1	19.4	61.3	3.2	100	75

A further insight into students' reasons for not doing homework derived from their responses to questions concerning the purpose of homework exercises (Appendix 1, Part B, Question 6). They were asked to state why they thought the teacher had set the particular homework exercises. Table 22 indicates that for English and social studies there were clear differences in the direction of greater understanding of the purpose of the homework by those who did the exercises. The differences were less marked in mathematics, but it will be recalled that the overall participation rate in that subject was very high (80.6 per cent).

Table 22. Year 9 : Percentage distribution according to whether students understood the purpose of the homework exercise.

Subject	Understood the purpose of the homework	Did not understand the purpose of the homework	Total %
English			
Did homework	70.7	29.3	100.0
Didn't do homework	53.4	46.6	100.0
Soc studies			
Did homework	86.0	14.0	100.0
Didn't do homework	64.1	35.9	100.0
Mathematics			
Did homework	92.3	7.7	100.0
Didn't do homework	96.8	3.2	100.0

These findings suggest that the likelihood of participation will be maximized where teachers make children accountable by following up and checking homework and by making clear the purpose of the exercises concerned. It will also be recalled that a large proportion of students in each of the three subjects perceived little value in the homework that they did. This suggests that teachers should be able to justify not only to themselves but also to their students the purpose and value of the homework they set.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Compared with other out-of-school commitments, homework did not place heavy demands on the time of these students. When requested to do homework most students complied, with the exception of English, where the overall participation rate was only 57 per cent. The analyses suggest that students were more likely to comply with homework demands if they understood the purpose of the exercise and if they believed that the work would be checked. It is not surprising that higher achievers tended to participate more than low achievers, although the trend was not strong. However, the direction of this relationship is unclear: participation may enhance achievement, and prior achievement may well motivate students to greater levels of participation. The strength of the relationship between achievement and participation was difficult to demonstrate because low achievers were set little homework. In mathematics, for example, there were only 10 homework cases at Basic Level out of the total of 386 cases observed. Subsequent interviews with teachers in these three schools confirmed that there was a widespread belief that homework was regarded as a strategy to be used with higher achievers.

Although it would be inappropriate to generalize beyond the three schools concerned, it is suggested that the SES background may not be as powerful a determinant of involvement in homework in Perth as in some other social contexts. This proposition was supported by the weak relationships between the SES background and participation, and by comments from students in each SES category about the supportive attitudes of their parents and the generally favourable physical contexts in which they did homework. This does not overlook the fact that some 15 per cent of students in lower SES groups reported unfavourable home study contexts compared with only 7 per cent in the higher SES groups. Overall, these limited analyses suggest that it may be what the teacher *does* in terms of structuring the introduction of homework exercises and following them through that is important, rather than what the student *is* in terms of his social background.

Chapter 6

THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK

YEARS 8, 9 and 10

Students in the four schools were asked to keep a homework diary record for one week. They recorded the out-of-class time spent on each subject, both during school time and at home. For the purpose of the following analysis homework time has been defined as time spent on assigned work *at home*. The student response rates were high (Table 23) considering the nature of the request, which was to enter the exact time spent on all subjects for seven days, including the week-end. The overall response rate in each school was in the order of 70 per cent, with a total of 559 diaries being completed.

Table 23. Years 8-10 : Percentage response rates to diary survey according to year-level and school

	Year 8		Year 9		Year 10		Total
	%	N	%	N	%	N	
Berry Mount	71	60	68	61	74	56	177
Mill Town	72	51	67	55	63	54	160
Cedar Brook	87	33	80	39	85	45	117
Newton	78	36	75	43	62	26	105
Total		180		196		181	559

Table 24 shows that at Berry Mount and Mill Town there was no increase in the average time spent on homework from Year 8 to Year 10. At Cedar Brook and Newton there was an increase over the three years, although at Cedar Brook it occurred only between Year 9 and Year 10. Table 24 also shows large differences between the average homework times of the different schools. Berry Mount, for example, recorded averages of less than half those of Mill Town and Newton at each year-level. These differences might be argued as arising from variation in the social milieux of the schools - that Berry Mount students were from lower SES backgrounds and were less involved in school and homework.

Such an explanation is unsatisfactory in this context because the earlier analyses showed no significant relationship between SES and *participation*, which is an important aspect of *time* spent.

This was further supported by the absence of significant relationships between *time* and SES background (Appendix 7). Although in each case N was low, Appendix 7 shows that the lowest SES groups in Year 9 recorded average homework times that were as high as those of the highest SES groups. Moreover, except for Year 10, Cedar Brook had only marginally higher averages, and its students were largely from higher SES backgrounds. Differences in the direction of higher mean times at Mill Town and Newton were interpreted as arising from differences in school policy. To some extent these policy differences may be detected in the views expressed by school administrators reported in the later sections of this report. Although no coherent official policy was identified in any of the schools, the Mill Town guide-lines did reflect the school's strong academic orientation, which in turn is reflected in the higher averages for homework time. This suggests that school policy and the expectations of classroom teachers may be stronger determinants of homework involvement than the social backgrounds of students.

The large standard deviations shown in Table 24 indicate a wide range in the times recorded by students. This is probably the main feature of homework behaviour observed in these schools. In simple terms some students spent a considerable time on homework, and many others did little or none.

Table 24. Year 8-10 : Average time spent on homework according to school and year-level. (N = 559)

School	Mean hours									Total
	Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
	m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	2.6	2.0	60	2.7	2.7	61	2.2	2.1	56	177
Mill Town	5.7	4.1	51	6.2	5.3	55	5.8	4.1	54	160
Cedar Brook	3.4	2.7	33	3.5	2.0	39	8.4	5.8	45	117
Newton	5.5	4.2	36	6.5	3.9	43	7.1	3.8	26	105
Total			180			198			181	559

Table 25 shows the times recorded by the 559 students according to the various subject areas. For the purpose of simply illustrating *the range* of times in the four core subjects no distinction is made according to year-level, remembering that Table 24 indicated little overall difference between the mean and standard deviations between year-levels.

Table 25. Years 8-10 : Percentage distribution of students according to homework time and subject area. (N = 559)

Subject area	Minutes per week							
	0	0-30	31-60	61-90	91-120	121-150	Over 150	Total %
Mathematics	20.0	21.9	20.5	15.9	6.9	5.3	9.5	100.0
English	38.1	22.7	16.9	8.7	4.0	4.0	5.6	100.0
Science	34.3	24.0	14.7	6.5	6.3	3.4	10.8	100.0
Social studies	31.3	24.6	14.8	9.3	7.1	2.6	9.8	100.0

From Table 25 it is clear that in the four schools concerned homework was of little consequence to most students. Over half did less than half an hour per week in each subject except mathematics, where 41 per cent did up to half an hour's homework per week. At the other end of the range a group of 10 to 15 per cent in each

subject spent over two hours per week. Average time thus means very little with respect to homework, for it varies greatly among students according to their work speed, conscientiousness, and the expectations of their teachers.

The standard deviations reported in Tables 26 to 29 indicate that a wide range of response was characteristic of all subjects at all levels in each school. These data also indicate that there was no systematic increase between Year 8 and 10 in the amount of homework done in any subject. In a number of cases the mean times at Year 8 were higher than those recorded in the same subject at the Year 10 level. The failure of the survey to illustrate any systematic increase could have been a function of sampling - that is, on the weeks observed there may have been large assignments set at the Year 8 level and little homework in the higher grades. However, the sample of 559 was large and included students drawn from 50 different classes. Moreover, teachers were asked to distribute the diaries during a 'typical' week clear of examinations or atypically long assignments. The interviews with administrators and teachers suggested that a more likely explanation was a lack of any firm school policy on the amount of homework which should be set at each grade level.

Table 26. English : Average weekly time in hours spent on homework according to year and school. (N = 355)

School	Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			Total
	m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	0.5	0.9	12	0.5	0.7	36	0.4	0.7	47	95
Mill Town	1.1	1.2	23	0.7	1.2	27	0.7	1.0	40	90
Cedar Brook	0.5	1.1	28	0.7	1.1	37	1.4	1.9	42	107
Newton	1.3	1.2	7	1.2	1.2	40	0.2	0.3	16	63
Total			70			140			145	355

Table 27. Mathematics : Average weekly time in hours spent on homework according to year and school. (N = 367)

School	Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			Total
	m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	0.8	0.8	21	0.7	0.6	36	0.3	0.5	48	105
Mill Town	1.6	1.0	23	1.1	1.2	28	1.1	1.2	40	91
Cedar Brook	0.9	0.8	29	1.0	0.7	37	2.5	1.8	43	109
Newton	1.4	1.2	7	1.2	0.8	40	1.5	0.9	15	62
Total			80			141			146	367

The wide range in time spent on homework is explained partly in terms of the students' achievement levels. Students were asked to record their achievement levels in their diaries, but almost one-third of the sample returned incomplete achievement-level data. This meant that the analyses reported in Appendices 8 to 11 were based on numbers ranging from as low as 352 in social studies to 367 in mathematics.

Table 28. Social Studies : Average weekly time in hours spent on homework according to year and school. (N = 352)

School	Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			Total
	m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	0.4	0.3	9	0.7	1.0	31	0.4	0.6	48	88
Mill Town	0.9	1.1	23	1.6	2.1	28	1.8	1.9	40	91
Cedar Brook	0.3	0.5	29	0.7	0.7	37	2.6	3.4	43	109
Newton	2.4	2.5	7	1.4	1.2	41	1.1	1.1	16	64
Total			68			137			147	352

Appendices 8 to 11 indicate that in each subject area in each school higher achievers, especially Advanced-level students, tended to average more time on homework. In the case of science, the Advanced groups were the only groups which committed any significant time to homework. Although Basic-level students

Table 29. Science : Average weekly time in hours spent on homework according to year and school. (n = 352)

School	Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			Total
	m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	0.1	0.3	18	0.7	1.0	35	0.4	0.6	49	102
Mill Town	2.1	2.1	23	1.6	2.2	27	1.3	1.8	40	90
Cedar Brook	0.3	0.4	29	0.3	0.4	37	0.8	1.3	43	109
Newton	0.9	0.7	7	1.4	1.1	40	3.0	2.5	16	63
Total			77			139			148	364

represented only 10 per cent of the return, their response indicated that in all subjects little time is devoted to homework. This is as many of their teachers said it should be. It should be remembered, however, that an earlier analysis relating to homework *participation* revealed only a weak relationship between school achievement and homework participation, as distinct from *time* spent. Lower achievers in these schools tended to comply with their teachers' requests to do homework as readily as their higher-achieving peers, but were apparently expected to do little or nothing in many cases.

YEAR 11 - UPPER SCHOOL

Students in two of the schools involved in the lower-school study (Cedar Brook and Newton) were asked to keep a homework diary record for two weeks, including two week-ends. The weeks chosen for the survey were as 'typical' as possible and fluctuations were averaged out to some extent by extending the time period to two weeks. The students were asked to record all time spent on homework, both in school time and at home. It was important that the in-school and out-of-school time be distinguished because there were differences between the schools in the amount of time available for free study during school hours. The analyses of total time spent have been adjusted to take this difference into account. At each school half of the Year 11 students were asked to participate. The response rate was 100 per cent, providing a sample of 84 students. This aspect of the research was of a more exploratory nature than the more comprehensive lower-school study. The sample was therefore smaller, and students who were in an alternative stream not leading to the Tertiary Admissions Examination were not included. The average total time per week spent on homework by the 84 students was 13.7 hours. Preliminary analysis indicated no significant overall difference between the schools in *total time* spent on homework, although there were differences in some subjects. Table 30 gives results in the small number of *subjects* in which there was a significant difference between the schools.

The data were also analysed to determine whether there was any difference between the time spent by those students who had made a career decision and those who stated their intended occupation as "unknown". No difference was found on this variable. There was also no significant relationship between the SES background and time spent on homework.

An investigation was also made of the time which various combinations of subjects demanded of student's homework time. A logical basis for subject groupings was according to the various mathematics

Table 30. Average weekly time in hours spent on homework according to subject* and school

Subject	Cedar Brook			Newton		
	Mean Hours	sd	n	Mean Hours	sd	n
Accounting	1.6	0.9	7	3.4	2.0	8
English	2.3	1.8	25	5.0	4.3	59
English Literature	7.9	5.5	14	2.5	2.0	11
Chemistry	6.2	3.5	17	1.8	1.3	17
Physics	10.4	4.8	7	2.0	1.4	18

* Only subject where there is a significant difference between schools are shown.

subjects taken by the student. Four subject groupings emerged: (1) those students taking Mathematics I; (2) those taking Mathematics II and Mathematics III; (3) those taking Mathematics IV; and (4) those not attempting any mathematics subject. To define low and high achievement levels within these groupings the students were ranked on the aggregate of their best five marks in their most recent examinations, the median value (335) being used as the cutting-point for high and low achievement. Table 31 shows the division of the sample on achievement.

Table 31. Average total weekly time in hours spent on homework according to mathematics group and achievement level

Mathematics group	Achievement level					
	High			Low		
	Mean hours	sd	n	Mean hours	sd	n
Mathematics I	12.1	6.2	23	12.7	4.9	24
Mathematics II & III	18.0	6.5	13	11.0	3.0	5
Mathematics IV	-	-	0	12.7	6.8	5
No mathematics	13.8	0	1	14.6	6.7	4

Table 31 shows that the average hours for all subjects for the high-achieving Mathematics II and III group are the highest overall, and for the low-achieving Mathematics II and III students the mean is the lowest overall. This suggests that the low achievers may have given up, or that they do so little work that they do not achieve. Also, the overall high achievers are in the Mathematics I/Mathematics II and III groups, but the Mathematics I group is split evenly between the achievement levels.

It was clear from the individual diaries that the *average* value could be a quite misleading statistic and that a clearer picture could be gained by studying the range of time spent. This is shown in Table 32 for subjects taken by 20 or more students.

Table 32. Percentage distribution of Year 11 students according to homework time and subject area

Subject	0 hrs	0-2 hrs	2-4 hrs	4-6 hrs	6-8 hrs	8+ hrs	N
English	3.7	47.5	32.5	8.8	6.3	1.2	80
Economics	3.2	87.1	9.7	0	0	0	31
English literature	4.0	40.0	32.0	8.0	4.0	12.0	25
Geography	5.9	74.5	15.7	3.9	0	0	51
History	21.7	43.5	13.0	13.0	4.3	4.3	23
Mathematics I	3.9	43.1	41.2	11.8	0	0	51
Mathematics II	0	20.0	50.0	20.0	10.0	0	20
Mathematics III	5.3	47.5	31.6	5.3	5.3	5.3	20
Biology	2.2	35.6	53.3	6.7	0	2.2	45
Chemistry	0	58.8	32.4	2.9	5.9	0	34
Physics	0	68.0	12.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	25

It is clear from Table 32 that most students in each subject did less than two hours' homework per week (with a significant number doing none at all!). A very small number of students spent more than four hours per week on homework in any particular subject. However, some of the maximum times (Table 33) were impressive. For instance, one student claimed to have spent 16¾ hours on English in one week and figures of 8 hours per week were not uncommon across a range of subjects. As shown in the lower school figures it is the *range* of time spent that seems to be of most significance. To allow comparison

with the lower-school values Table 33 shows the time spent in subjects comparable with English, mathematics, social studies and science.

Table 33. Total average weekly time in hours spent by Year 11 students according to subject and achievement level

Subject	Achievement level						Max. number of hours
	High			Low			
	mean	sd	n	mean	sd	n	
English	2.9	2.8	33	2.0	1.5	38	8.4
English Lit.	1.8	1.5	15	5.0	3.3	9	5.9
Mathematics I	2.3	1.5	23	2.4	1.4	24	6.1
Mathematics II	3.5	1.3	13	2.9	2.5	6	6.1
Mathematics III	2.5	2.1	13	2.0	1.4	5	8.3
Mathematics IV	-	-	0	1.7	1.2	5	3.8
History	2.6	2.5	14	1.7	2.5	7	8.2
Geography	1.0	0.8	17	1.4	1.3	28	5.0
Economics	0.7	0.6	9	1.2	1.0	19	3.5
Physics	2.7	2.8	16	1.7	1.1	7	8.3
Chemistry	2.5	2.0	21	2.0	1.0	12	6.8
Biology	2.0	1.4	20	2.8	1.6	20	8.4

Table 33 shows a complex relationship between subject, achievement level and time spent on homework. English, mathematics subjects, physics and chemistry show consistently higher mean values in the high than in the low-achievement groups. Because the high achievers put in more time it could be postulated that they tend to widen the gap between themselves and their lower-achieving peers. In this respect English is an excellent indicator subject, being the only subject common to all students in the study. Biology still tends to be regarded as a 'soft' science option and, along with the humanities group of English literature, geography and economics, shows more time spent by the students in the low-achievement group. The only exception was history, where one of the higher-achieving groups had a long assignment due at the end of the survey period. It may be that the higher achievers work more efficiently and need to spend less time on these subjects than do lower achievers.

Table 33 should be read in conjunction with the appropriate tables in the lower-school study. There is certainly a dramatic increase in average homework time from middle school (Years 8-10) to upper school (Year 11), although it was suggested earlier that the *range* of time spent and the proportion of students who do no homework in a given subject seem to be of more interest than the mean value. In this respect it is relevant to compare the standard deviations for the middle- and upper-school means. The spread of the middle-school values in relation to the mean is consistently higher than the spread of upper-school values, indicating that most upper-school students were working closer to a higher mean value and thus more consistently.

Summary

The analysis for Year 8 to 10 showed large differences in average homework times between the different schools. However, within each school the overall differences between the average times recorded from Year 8 to Year 10 were generally small. The big leap in homework time occurred between Year 10 and Year 11, indicating that the transition to upper school involves considerable adjustment by students to the demands on their free time and their capacity for independent study.

The generally smaller standard deviations around higher subject means indicated that upper-school students worked more consistently and closer to much higher average times than the Year 8-10 group. Finally the large differences in the average times recorded by students taking different subject electives in the upper school indicated that different subject combinations exerted vastly different demands upon students' time.

Chapter 7

ADMINISTRATORS' VIEWS

In this section, administrators were the principals and the senior subject teachers in the three schools. The aim was to determine whether a school homework policy existed, and the extent to which it was known and endorsed by senior staff. These administrators were also asked to state their views about homework generally, including its functions and its role in relation to low-achieving students. The low achiever was singled out for special comment because teachers had earlier stressed the importance of homework for slower students who could not complete classroom work.

The starting-point of each interview focused on the extent to which a homework policy was perceived to exist in each school Earlier discussions with teachers had suggested that no such policy existed.

BERRY MOUNT

The Principal

As an aid to parents and staff, the Principal had prepared guidelines, which were published in the annual school prospectus. These stated:

> "Students can take it that, like the rest of the community, they should work a 40-hour week. This means that after 25 hours at school, they should do at least 15 hours at home."

The Principal observed that in practice only higher-achieving students were expected to work this much "overtime". The need for homework for low achievers, specifically in the Basic-level programme, was perceived as minimal because their courses were less demanding. In fact, the Principal doubted the value of homework for low achievers. He was of the opinion that it contributed little to the improvement of their overall school achievement. To illustrate, he cited the following case :

> "A parent comes and says, 'My son isn't doing very well at school. Can you give him some more homework so he can stop being Basic and become Intermediate?' The answer is 'No'. The addition of homework doesn't allow a student to move into a higher grade unless he has been wrongly categorized in the first place."

Homework was perceived as appropriate for the higher-achieving (Intermediate and Advanced) students, but how the homework should be structured was described only loosely. The guide-line was that students should do all set homework and, in addition, spend about half as much time again on private study. The Principal's policy at Berry Mount was *time*-based and open to a wide interpretation according to the age and ability-levels of students. Although a general policy statement had been recorded in the school prospectus, the Principal was uncertain whether it had been read or remembered by teachers, pupils or parents. Indeed there was no systematic communication of homework policy (however general) to those responsible for its implementation and supervision. The Principal commented that

> "Only in an *ad hoc* way do I convey attitudes on homework to teachers, and then only really when a problem occurs. I would be surprised if they remember we've even talked about it."

In the absence of any clearly communication policy, homework practice depended entirely on the educational philosophies of particular classroom teachers. This may have contributed to the wide range of views on the nature and role of homework expressed by teachers.

Although he had not legislated any policy for homework, the Principal held firm views about its function. He perceived it as a means of consolidating knowledge and skills acquired at school. In comparison, all other purposes held little value. Even "finishing off", held by most teachers in his school to be the main type of homework, was perceived by him as useful only to the extent that it *consolidated* school learning. Preparatory exercises were also held as being of little value because "children who get the wrong impression in exploring a new idea may consolidate that wrong impression".

Although he acknowledged the value in homework as consolidation of learning, especially for higher achievers, the Principal considered that little would be lost if homework were abolished, provided that step was taken by *all* schools. He acknowledged that much of the necessity for homework derived from the competitive nature of the system, which compelled the use of out-of-school time to maintain comparability of Statewide assessment standards.

Senior subject teachers*

The senior teachers in the three subject areas recognized no school homework policy, but distinguished between the absence of a policy and the existence of guide-lines for parents on the appropriate time allocations for homework at various grade levels.

The senior mathematics teacher argued that it would be inappropriate for the Princcipal to lay down a mandatory school policy on the following grounds :

> "It's much more of a departmental thing or even a personal teacher thing. I've never been anywhere where there's a policy."

In fact, for mathematiccs there was not even a departmental policy, and the senior teacher left it to the discretion of individual teachers because he did not believe "that anyone can tell the classroom teacher how much work their kids should be doing". The same attitude was expressed by the senior English teacher, who observed that no general policy existed in his department and that teachers worked on the basis of their own experience.

> "The Principal would not collect the senior teachers together and say that he wants one to one-and-a-half hours of homework at Year 9. He would leave that to our personal discretion. He's never come out with a firm statement. The educational development of the students is left to the subject masters and that's another reason why there's no coherent policy."

The senior social studies teacher further confirmed the absence of any school homework policy, although his department had agreed to set minimum amounts of homework partly because "the school day is the school day and home life is that belonging to the family and the student", and partly because in many cases home environments were not conducive to study.

To summarize, Berry Mount offered guide-lines to parents on the amount of homework time expected of students, based on the concept of a 40-hour week. This related largely to the average and above-average achievers.

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* For the three subject areas surveyed in Year 9, viz. mathematics, English and social studies.

For low achievers little homework was expected. No attempt had been made to communicate a homework policy to teachers systematically, largely because the Principal and the senior teachers regarded homework decisions as being more appropriately made by classroom teachers.

MILL TOWN

The Principal

The Principal had prepared several comprehensive statements about homework, both in the annual Information Handbook and in monthly news-sheets. These provided suggestions on the "ideal conditions" for study. They included a room away from noise, radio and television, and other members of the family. Recommendations were made for the maximum homework time, starting with one-and-a-half hours at Year 8 and Year 9, rising to three hours at Year 12 six times a week. The Information Handbook noted that the purpose of the time-scale was to allow the students

> "to get to Year 12 in a state of mind that will enable them to do the minimum at least to quality for tertiary education if that is what they had in mind to do. Students need weaning to study gradually."

The guide-lines also included suggestions about how students' study time should be spent. Homework comprised set homework, immediate revision of work learned during the day, and revision of past work. As a guide for teachers, students and parents, the statements were comprehensive and explicit. However, the Principal was not prepared to interpret them as a school *policy*.

> "Is it a policy rather than a guide-line? Would I, in other words, remove the autonomy from the teacher? No, of course I wouldn't."

The Principal took an active role in the homework process, but had not adopted any procedures for determining whether his guide-lines were being implemented.

> "I am the educational leader in that I decide on policies in consultation. I entrust the supervision of the children to the teachers and the supervision of the teachers to the senior masters. I don't go into each classroom and ask what has been set and what should have been done."

As with Berry Mount, the responsibility lay with individual teachers to interpret the guide-lines in terms of whatever educational philosophies or practices they wished to adopt.

The Principal perceived the primary function of homework in terms of its usefulness as a preparation for upper-school studies and ultimately tertiary education. He observed that

> "At lower school the bright child can achieve to the top of the measurable scale without any homework. That indicates to me that homework is a socially imposed necessity. It isn't an academic necessity for the bright child. At Year 11 and Year 12 it is a different thing. The highly intelligent child can fail miserably at Year 12, merely because he hasn't developed study habits. It's the development of study habits and mental readiness for later study which is so important."

The primary purpose of homework was perceived as developing appropriate study and learning skills required in the upper school. While this was at the forefront of the Principal's thinking, he did accknowledge that homework served other purposes, including keeping children off the streets. "If homework keeps a child at home with his parents and out of some pinball parlour, then it has served its purpose."

Homework was also viewed in terms of fostering an appropriate work ethic. This was seen by the Principal to be particularly important at Mill Town, where hard work and competition helped to maintain the school's high academic standards.

The Principal perceived a close relationship between school schievement, homework, and home background. A supportive home environment was likely to be associated with high achievement and participation in home study. He cited the case of a highly motivated student in an advanced mathematics group as indicating a supportive home environment.

> "The student from a scholarly background is encouraged to pursue scholarship and it is tempting for a teacher to extend that student's ability by setting homework which he knows the student will complete."

Conversely, he assumed that a child from an environment where "there is little reading, intelligent conversation or entertainment of a type that is productive" would be achieving at a low level. Such a student would be reluctant to work in school and therefore reluctant to "extend that displeasure at the homework stage." In this case, the Principal perceived that, for low-achieving students in unfavourable home environments, less commitment to homework could be expected and achieved. The Principal also believed that the current Achievement Certificate assessment procedures do not encourage teachers to extend low achievers through additional practice, study or revision at home. He observed that

> "The teacher knows that there is no external exam which these low-achievers are going to fail. They are normatively assessed - that is, it doesn't matter how poor the quality is, the bottom 25% of that quality will be assessed as a Basic pass."

When asked to comment on the prospect of no homework at all in the school, the Principal reiterated the sentiments expressed in one of his monthly newsletters:

> "Ideally one might express the wish that home study could be greatly reduced, if not entirely eliminated. However, the external pressures for competitive entry to tertiary studies and to employment would suggest a marked disadvantage to the first group of students to venture so boldly away from the *status quo*."

The competitive nature of entry to higher education and employment thus made it impossible for this principal to take an independent stand on homework. Exactly the same point was made by the Principal of Berry Mount.

Senior subject teachers

Homework practice was determined by classroom teachers rather than by direction from the Principal or senior subject teachers.

The senior English teacher suggested that it was best for the school "to keep it as general as possible and let each department enunciate a specific policy". However, his department did not have a "specific policy". Teachers were allowed total flexibility according to the needs of their classes. This was also the case in the mathematics department, where teachers had "an inbuilt understanding that Year 12s will be doing more than Year 8s." Nor did the social studies department have a set policy. The senior teachers' concern, however, was to achieve a balance between classwork and homework and to ensure that there was not too much emphasis on homework in the assessment programme.

The purposes of homework were perceived by the senior teachers mainly in terms of course coverage, consolidation and revision of classwork. The school's emphasis upon competitive academic achievement also caused homework to be valued in terms of the extent to which it prepared students for independent study in the upper school.

The senior staff's views on the appropriateness of homework for low achievers were similar to those expressed at Berry Mount. The mathematics senior teacher observed that

> "Basics get very little if any homework to do. This reflects that there are lots of problems getting homework out of Basic students. It creates a confrontation situation which teachers don't want to face too often."

Any homework that he set for low achievers was given to satisfy parents rather than to meet what he regarded as any worth-while student-related goal. One of his concerns was that errors tended to be reinforced to such an extent that homework became counter-productive.

Although the social studies and English senior teachers did not entirely dismiss homework as a teaching strategy with low achievers, they also perceived that it had limited value at that level.

To summarize, the administrative emphasis placed on homework was strong, particularly in school publications. Its functions were seen as including a gradual preparation for the demands of upper school, as an expansion of time available to cover the curriculum, and even as a means of keeping children occupied and off the streets. These emphases had not been defined as "school policy" and were perceived more as guide-lines, which left policy-making almost entirely in the hands of class-room teachers.

CEDAR BROOK

The Principal

As for Mill Town and Berry Mount high schools, there were guide-lines for parents, teachers and students published annually. The guide-lines were as comprehensive as those of Mill Town in that they explained that homework should comprise research work and assignments, completion of unfinished class work, and study and revision. Advice on how to study was also provided and the necessity for homework was expressed in the following terms:

> "Much of the learning must be done at home because the school day isn't long enough for students to be taught and at the same time given enough time to learn. This makes homework and study very necessary."

The guide-lines made no recommendations about the appropriate amount of time for homework. However, when interviewed, the Principal stated that students at Year 8 should be doing one hour per night, Year 9 one-and-a-half hours, increasing gradually to Year 12. He had a definite expectation that homework should be set on a *time* basis, but was not prepared to legislate a set policy. He recognized that some teachers in his school had adopted a no-homework policy, leaving children free to pursue "lines of interest". In most instances he regarded such practice as "a marvellous let-out for the teacher who is not overly conscientious."

Having described what he expected, the Principal conceded, as did the other principals, that communication of homework policy

was poor. In particular, he noted the difficulties in communicating the school's day-to-day homework expectations to parents. The school used homework diaries, but this was often ineffective because "kids tended to lose them, or not all teachers asked students to write homework down in the diaries". The potential supportive role of parents, regarded by each of the principals as crucial in the homework process, was undermined by ineffective channels of communication.

The Principal expressed views about the purposes of homework similar to those of his colleagues in the other two schools. He perceived it primarily as a preparation for upper school, and of providing additional time for study outside class time. He added that homework served to meet the expectation of parents.

> "Homework is set to convince parents that you *are* setting homework. People set homework which has to be written out. Perhaps it's not particularly relevant, but they are being seen to set homework."

Because he saw homework primarily in terms of its value for upper school preparation, the Principal questioned its relevance for low achievers :

> "If a student isn't going on to tertiary studies, then it's questionable whether homework has any relevance. I think most teachers question the relevance. That's why you'll find little homework is set for low-ability students. It's much harder to justify it for some of them with low attention spans."

Like the other two principals, he perceived homework very much as a strategy to be used with the average and above-average students.

Senior subject teachers

There was common agreement that every department was autonomous and should determine its own policy free from directions from the Principal. The senior mathematics teacher saw homework as a valuable aid to learning, whereas the social studies and English senior teachers tended to play down the importance of formal homework

exercises. The reasons for this related to the manner in which they defined their various subject areas. The mathematics teacher explained:

> "Homework serves the purpose of reinforcing and revising concepts. Continued revision is so vital because maths is a sequential subject. It builds on what children already know."

In English, on the other hand, whatever "policy" existed leaned towards an emphasis on informal exercises such as reading books, newspapers and magazines, or watching recommended television programmes.

> "Our main concern is to get kids reading, writing and expressing themselves orally as best they can. Our concept of homework is going on all the time. That's why we don't bother about formal homework. It's just part of everyday life."

A similar policy was described by the social studies senior teacher, who felt that six periods a week should be enough to cover his course without setting formal homework.

Despite the reservations of the English and social studies teachers about formal homework, all three senior teachers attributed some value to homework. Apart from giving students the opportunity to reinforce and revise classwork, the mathematics teacher saw homework as helping to keep the class together, and as particularly useful for slower students.

Homework was described by the English teacher as "a necessary evil" in the upper school "because the pressures are on you to cover the T.A.E. syllabus, which we don't like at all, and in the lower school as a necessary training to meet those demands."

Although no formal policy existed at Cedar Brook, the Principal and the three senior teachers interviewed had firm views about homework. The Principal was convinced that some homework was necessary and that time-based guide-lines should be followed. However, he was unwilling to make those guide-lines mandatory. Like their colleagues in the other schools, the senior subject teachers also

believed that decisions concerning homework practice should be left to individual teachers, and that their personal views should in no way be translated as department policies.

CONCLUSION

What is clear from these interviews with principals and senior subject teachers is that no coherent *school* homework policy existed in any of the three schools. Each principal and senior teacher expressed a personal attitude; in each case that attitude had been presented as guide-lines in various school publications. Interestingly, the viewpoint expressed in each of the schools to some extent reflected the schools' social and academic milieux. The Berry Mount guide-lines had industrial connotations, including the concept of a forty-hour week; the Mill Town guide-lines reflected the school's strongly academic orientation, as did those of Cedar Brook, which embraced the additional element of recognition of the apparent pressure from its middle-class constituency.

None of the school administrators was prepared to interpret his or her personal viewpoint as a school or departmental policy. They felt that decisions about the nature and amount of homework were the professional responsibility of each teacher. However, implicit in their comments was a major contradiction in the homework process - between senior staffs' recognition of a class-room teacher's professional autonomy on the one hand, and on the other their conviction that homework had value and that teachers should set it regularly within time-based guide-lines.

Chapter 8

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON HOMEWORK

Teachers' perceptions of the nature and function of homework were explored through a series of interviews. These were conducted with 27 teachers of the classes involved in the study and a sample of 10 other teachers not involved with the 27 classes observed. Teachers of the classes concerned were interviewed after each of the two case studies*; the other teachers were interviewed only once. Their ages ranged from 20 to 53 years, and teaching experience varied from less than one year to twenty-four years.

The first section of this chapter is concerned with teachers' reasons for setting homework. This is followed by their opinions on the different types of homework and the purposes served by each. The last section deals with views on the appropriate time that should be spent on homework and its role for pupils of different ability levels.

TEACHERS' REASONS FOR SETTING HOMEWORK

In general teachers explained that they set homework because of tradition, because of pressure from teacher colleagues, administrators and parents, or because they believed in the intrinsic value of homework. Each of these motives for setting homework is discussed below.

Tradition

Many patterns of behaviour persist simply because they are not challenged. This can be said about homework. Some teachers set it because it "has always happened", and give little thought to its value or appropriateness for different students and different learning tasks. That position was summarized by an English teacher, who observed:

> "It's always been an expected thing. I suppose I go back to my own studies and I'm very much aware of how much I expected homework. I never resented homework although I led a sheltered experience when I was at school so I didn't have any conflicting interests to make me frustrated..."

Homework is an established part of schooling; there is no reason to question its existence. One teacher felt his students would be "robbed" if it were not assigned.

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* Because of staff movement three different teachers joined the study for the second case study.

> "When I was at school I used to love to do homework. My kids all love it. My wife does homework - I suppose I've traditionally set it."

In the course of the interview other teachers seemed to realize for the first time that their approach was based almost entirely on custom. The same teacher who had commented that his students would be "robbed" acknowledged that

> "If you took the whole concept of homework away from the schools, I don't know whether it would make much difference. *It has never occurred to me.*"

For some teachers in each of the schools, homework passed unquestioned in this manner as part of schooling to be carried on in much the same way as it had been given to them as students.

Peer-group pressure

Because their colleagues set homework, some teachers felt a sense of guilt, and even failure, if they did not conform. This was particularly the case among English teachers, who observed:

> "There's a feeling of failure if you don't give any. It's the done thing. You feel the conflict between English and the factually oriented subject."

and

> "When I set homework it's because I feel guilty - guilty because I haven't set any. I feel I ought to because everyone tells me I have to set it."

Colleague pressure also derived from competitiveness. Some teachers felt compelled to set homework to ensure parity of performance among classes. One teacher commented:

> "Teacher comparison is a very real fact. If one person is allowing their students to go home and beautify their files, work presentation standards will be very different. We are all aware of this."

In some cases homework was set in this manner as a response to teachers' concern that comparisons might be drawn between work standards in different classes.

Administrative pressure

Teachers were virtually unanimous that there were no official statements on homework in their schools that could be regarded as prescriptive.

Either there was no policy of any kind or there existed a "vague convention" that was not enforced. Most teachers were aware of statements made by their principals about desirable homework time allocations for various age groups, but these were regarded as guide-lines for parents rather than as formal school policies. The decision to set homework was relatively free from any overt administrative pressure. Most teachers felt that the decision rested with them and believed that nothing would be gained if an official policy existed.

In contrast there were a few who did experience administrative pressure. These were mainly younger probationary teachers, who identified the source as their superintendents. One English teacher said:

> "Superintendents say, 'I want to see things in their files - fat files'. With that over your head, of course, you will provide it. You set homework to get it done."

A young mathematics teacher also noted the importance of superintendents' expectations. Although he doubted the value of homework, he assigned it regularly because he felt he had to.

> "The school system tells me to, indirectly through pamphlets, superintendents, the Principal. When you are looking for permanency, they ask, 'Have you checked homework? Have you checked their files?' And, of course, you have to do it."

It seems that administrators do not usually provide directive leadership in this matter. However, they can be instrumental in deciding a teacher's practices, particularly if that teacher is newly qualified and probationary.

Parental pressure

Many parents expect that their children be assigned work to be done at home. There are several reasons for this. They were brought up in an education system which placed heavy reliance on homework, and just as some teachers set it because it is traditional, some parents expect it to be set for the same reason. Other parents demand homework to keep their children occupied after school. Others have high aspirations for their children, and additional work is seen as one of the ways to achieve success. One teacher reported:

> "Parents have rung the school administration and have complained that their children have nothing to do whenever they get home. So the principal tells me I have to set homework. There seems to be no other reason given than it meets parental demands."

Sometimes parental pressure can be excessive, and teachers see that those expectations may well have to be modified:

> "One boy, for instance, gets up at 4 a.m. and works (at a job). His parents are really pushing him at school as well. He then goes to school, goes home and works until it's dark, and then sits down to do his homework. And his parents are pressurizing him to do more homework, to do better. Yet they also want him to keep working."

In cases like this teachers pointed to the need for parents to be given guidance from the school on what are realistic expectations.

Intrinsic value

So far the discussion of teachers' motives for setting homework has related largely to factors *extrinsic* to the work itself. Although tradition and pressures from parents and colleagues apparently determine some teachers' homework policies, the majority who set homework do so because they perceive that it has some *intrinsic* value and serves a variety of important ends. These range from the development of independent thought and study skills, to the more pragmatic goals of finishing off classwork and covering the curriculum. These various types of homework and teachers' views about the purposes they serve are discussed in the following section.

TYPES OF HOMEWORK AND THEIR PURPOSES

Finishing off

A significant majority of teachers* stated that finishing off class work, either at home or at some other time during the school day, was the most frequently set task. This type of homework served a wide variety of purposes:

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* Teachers were asked which types of homework they set most often. Their responses (Appendix 12) were the basis for statements concerning teachers' views on the relative importance of the types of homework discussed in this section.

(1) To complete course requirements

The most common reason that teachers gave for setting finishing-off type homework was that there was simply not enough time during the school day to cover the course in the required depth or breadth. One teacher observed that

> "As far as maths is concerned, it (homework) is practically essential anyway. It's very difficult to complete the course without having homework. We just haven't enough time during the week to get through it."

This need to cover the course was perceived as being more important for Advanced and Intermediate-level students than for the lower-achieving Elementary and Basic-level students. This distinction was drawn clearly by one teacher, who said:

> "With my Year 9 Advanced class I've an awful lot of trouble getting through the course. There's a lot to get through. If it gets to the stage of having done half the exercises in class, I'd say 'Finish it off at home'."

The teacher then explained that if it was a lower-ability group he would say, "Blow it, they were working O.K. I'll let them work on it next period." In the case of his higher achievers, he considered it time wasted if unfinished work had to wait to be completed in the succeeding period. He assumed that such students had the maturity to finish the exercises at home. He did not make the same assumptions about wasted time or student maturity with respect to lower achievers.

In English where much of the class-room time is spent on developing ideas and encouraging student interaction, teachers contended that homework was necessary for the practical activities that frequently arose from class-room discussions. Similar views were expressed by teachers in other subject areas, where the time available during the school day was perceived as insufficient to do justice to the course.

(2) To consolidate classwork

Teachers perceived that finishing off classwork in the students' own time consolidated and reinforced learning. It was widely seen as a means of saving class time for new work.

"Homework is important because it backs up any skills and knowledge that are learned in class. The more reinforcement you get the better it is. If you don't reinforce the things you taught in class they tend to get thrown into a corner and just forgotten about."

Consolidation of classwork was so important in the eyes of many teachers that they felt that, before students "switched off at night", they should consolidate what they have learned during the day, or they would forget.

(3) To accommodate different work rates

The preference for completing classwork, and a lack of emphasis on preparatory exercises, indicated the concern of teachers to keep all the pupils in their classes together in terms of the amount of work completed. Finishing off at home was seen as one important strategy for dealing with differences in aptitude and rates of learning. The problem of accommodating different rates of working was a particular concern for teachers of English and social studies because their classes were generally unstreamed, and finishing-off-type homework was one of their more important teaching strategies.

Thus, although homework was most often used to allow pupils to finish off classwork, it was also used for a number of other purposes. These were research (short and long assignments), revision, and preparation for future classwork. The function served by these other kinds of homework overlap with those served by finishing off. Revision, for example, may also serve to consolidate classwork, and independent research assignments can also serve to cover the curriculum and provide greater depth for topics introduced in class.

Research assignments

The tasks set in this category of homework varied from short assignments to major projects. In English and social studies, teachers reported that their lesson time was often devoted to discussion. Some teachers felt that the class-room offered students a unique opportunity to obtain the viewpoints of a group of twenty or thirty peers. Because the class-room provides for such an exchange of views and clarification of ideas, some of these teachers relied on homework for the extended

writing and research which arose from discussion.

Teachers also tended to use homework for time-consuming tasks unsuited to the limitations of class-room time. These included activities such as interviewing, film and television viewing, creative writing, extended reading, and the gathering and synthesis of material for assignments that extended over several weeks.

Apart from allowing students to undertake more time-consuming and extended learning tasks, homework in this category was seen as crucial to the development of independent study skills such as self-reliance, the ability to plan, and the ability to locate relevant resources. It was also seen as important in fostering the understanding that learning is not just school-based and that important sources of information exist within the family and the community more widely. One teacher observed:

> "Ideas and knowledge aren't just school-based. Students have to work by themselves, and they have to involve other members of the family. If work is just done within the school, the students don't get the idea that they use the qualities they have gained during school outside of the school context."

The main value which teachers placed on research-type homework in terms of its promotion of independent study skills was as a preparation for the pressures of upper school. Many teachers complained that, because of insufficient practice of this kind in the lower school, many students arrived in upper school completely unprepared for the volume of extended independent study and research they had to undertake. Research-based homework was therefore perceived as a "a lead-in to upper school" and as as exercise in self-discipline. With more students returning to school after Year 10, this aspect of homework was claimed to be of growing importance.

Revision

The value teachers attached to revision-type homework was similar to that attached to "finishing-off" homework. It was seen as providing opportunity for the practice and consolidation of skills learned in class. This general view was summed up by the observation that

> "Students tend to forget, so we keep throwing the concepts back at them. If I don't set any homework, then I'd have to spend a lot more time on revision. It's a basic study technique. The more times you study a topic, the more it sinks in. The more often I throw a topic at them for homework, the more important they see it."

Preparatory homework

Homework as specific preparation for subsequent lessons was assigned very rarely in Year 9. Although most teachers considered them useful, preparatory exercises were seen as problematical. Several found that students did not complete this kind of homework and that they could not proceed as planned because not everyone in the class was adequately prepared. One teacher reported:

> "Preparation is very important to get the students to think about the next topic ... to discover for themselves. However, most of the class would not put themselves out to do it. Preparation constitutes a small part of the homework process ... it's a law of diminishing returns."

Preparatory work was seen as more appropriate in upper school, where students had acquired the necessary study skills, self-discipline and motivation. On the rare occasions that preparatory exercises were set in the lower school, they were intended to develop techniques of exploration and independent learning.

Summary

In summary, administrative and colleague pressures were perceived by some teachers as very real, but homework was generally not set solely as a response to those pressures. It was assigned more commonly to help cover the curriculum, to consolidate and revise class work, to develop independent learning skills, and to provide opportunities for activities of a time-consuming nature.

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE APPROPRIATE AMOUNT OF TIME FOR HOMEWORK

In general teachers felt that between one and one-and-a-half hours homework per night was appropriate at Year 9. How that time should be allocated and co-ordinated was perceived as a major problem that was complicated by different pupil abilities and work rates, and the needs of different subject areas. Teachers acknowledged that the co-ordination of homework across the various subjects was a major hindrance to the maintenance of a regular and uniform homework pattern. They were quick to point out that there was no efficient method of checking how much homework was set, or how long students spent doing it. The problem was complicated by unstreamed classes in which students could take three or thirty minutes to complete an assigned task. Many teachers commented that

they found it difficult to estimate how much time was spent on particular tasks, and that they relied upon the complaints of their students and their own judgement to ensure that homework "evened itself out" over time.

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON HOMEWORK FOR LOW ACHIEVERS*

Teachers were divided on the issue of whether low achievers should be asked to spend any time on homework. Teachers who claimed that homework was unnecessary for these students believed that their syllabuses could be completed in class time :

> "Average Basics can get their work done in class, so usually there is very little homework. I would tend not to give homework to Basics."

Another teacher reported that he had discovered by trial and error that he did not need to set homework in his Elementary mathematics class. He set homework until he discovered that he was getting through the course too quickly.

> "I started off giving homework. We were galloping through doing activities and moving at quite a pace. Then I looked at what was happening and we were going too fast. So we slowed down."

Trial and error explained why other teachers had arrived at a no-homework policy for low achievers. Many *had* set them homework earlier in their teaching careers but had given up in the face of negative pupil attitudes and lack of response. This was explained by one maths teacher, who believed that low achievers should be given homework and could profit from it, but he did not set it because

> "You couldn't really expect them to do too much. It's hard enough getting their interest for forty minutes, let alone trying to prolong it for another twenty minutes at night."

This was a contradiction expressed by most maths teachers interviewed. A colleague of the above teacher claimed that, unless he was "physically there" helping low achievers with their work, they could not complete the exercises.

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* Low achievers refers to the lower one-third of the achievement range and includes those following the Basic-level syllabus and those in the lower range of the Elementary mathematics course and the Intermediate Pass levels in other subjects.

Furthermore, he explained that there was a significant range of ability, even within the general classification of "low ability". Setting homework would involve a considerable amount of preparation to accommodate that range and he was not prepared to do it.

> "Partly because I'm lazy. I suppose I should set homework, but I've fallen into the trap of not setting it."

Another problem identified was the tendency for lower achievers to reinforce errors when doing homework. Again this problem was specific to mathematics. Error reinforcement had become so problematical that one teacher said that he discouraged homework at the Basic level.

Many teachers had therefore adopted a no-homework policy with low achievers because those students could not cope by themselves, and because there was enough class time anyway. Moreover, the observation was made that, even if these students did get jobs, they would be jobs "where they did not have to take work home, so what is the point." Training in independent study skills was therefore seen as irrelevant.

A significant group of teachers also pointed to negative pupil attitudes as a reason for not expecting homework from low achievers. A social studies teacher mentioned the risk of confrontation.

> "One group of kids is fairly anti-school. If I can't get the work done in class what's the point in trying to get them to do it at home? When it boils down to it, many won't do it, so you have a confrontation situation."

The opinion that homework was inappropriate or unnecessary for Basic-level students was strongest amongst mathematics teachers. Perhaps this was because mathematics presents a special set of demands on low achievers, and also because mathematics groups in the three schools were streamed. The adoption of a no-homework policy in the unstreamed English and social studies classes was certainly perceived by many teachers as difficult. One teacher remarked that although he did not want to set low achievers homework he did so because:

> "... these classes aren't streamed, so you have to give homework to all of them. If I had a class of just weak kids, I'd cut it down considerably."

Homework strategies with lower achievers were suggested by a number of teachers who recognized the problems, but still set homework. In general

they stressed that homework for low achievers should be enjoyable and meaningful in the immediate sense; that it should give students immediate results because 'most of them haven't got the notion of deferred gratification ... and aren't doing something for next year." Other teachers commented that a coercive approach with low achievers was inappropriate and that they had found an encouraging, motivating approach more productive. One teacher recalled that he had

> "Tried to 'come the heavy' with Basics, but I've gone back to the method of encouraging the kids to like what they are doing, to be interested in it and then, hopefully, it would be their own motivation which encourages them to do homework."

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

This section was concerned with teachers' motives for setting homework. Their opinions on the appropriate allocation of time were also discussed, particularly with respect to low achievers. The interviews revealed that, although a number of factors such as tradition, and pressure from peers, administrators and parents do influence some teachers' homework policies, a major determinant of teachers' homework strategies is the extent to which they believe that homework has an intrinsic value. Generally teachers do perceive such value in homework, particularly in terms of providing opportunities to finish off classwork, to consolidate, to revise and to research longer topics of interest.

Although no official school policy was perceived or acknowledged, there was a surprisingly high level of consensus that students should spend one to one-and-a-half hours per night on homework, although for many teachers this expectation was confined to average and above-average achievers.

Chapter 9

STUDENTS' VIEWS

One hundred and thirty-five* students were interviewed in the manner illustrated in Table 2 (Chapter 3). These were 66 girls and 69 boys drawn from the English, social studies and maths classes. Where possible two students who had done their homework and two who had not were selected from each of the classes concerned. The students selected were judged by their teachers as either regular homework participants or as regular non-participants. The purpose of the interviews was to identify factors that students perceived as relevant to their involvement or lack of involvement.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATION IN HOMEWORK

Marks, reports and jobs

The majority of students emphasized a link between homework participation and school achievement. Striving for "better marks, keeping higher grades, doing better in tests" were mentioned frequently as reasons for doing homework. Even typical non-participants said that, on the rare occasions that they did homework, it was to gain marks for assessment. Over three-quarters of the homework participants claimed that they did it because "every bit of homework counts".

> "It's important for tests and grades. You need to get good grades to go to upper school and then you can do what you want with your life."

Even students' intrinsic interest in the subject was overshadowed by the prospect of marks when it came to homework. One girl reported that she "didn't get much out of it academically" and that "most times it was for the mark." A link was also perceived between good marks, good reports and employment. Students were quick to note that homework participation was often used by teachers in reports as a gauge of their attitudes, and that comments on attitudes were important to prospective employers. In addition to the desire for a good report, students said that good marks in selected subjects, notably mathematics and English were vital to their employment prospects. An otherwise uninvolved student

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* Twelve students were interviewed both on Occasion 1 and Occasion 2, giving a total of 147 interviews - approximately 27 per cent of the sample involved in the research.

did his mathematics homework because "you need a good mark in maths for a job". In contrast, he never did his homework in English because "as long as you can talk proper, you don't need a good mark." He was the exception rather than the rule, for most students who participated in homework did so in all their core subjects, which they perceived as important for marks, reports and jobs.

Teacher influence

Next to marks and achievement, the influence of the teacher was the most important determinant of homework behaviour. Many said they did homework to avoid punishment, which included lunch-time or after-school detention, "scab duty" (cleaning up the play areas after recess or lunch), or other sanctions from teachers. Fear of the teacher and the concern "to keep out of trouble" was enough to motivate most of these students. There was frequent mention of detention at Berry Mount, where almost half the students referred to scab duty and detention as strong motivating factors. Typical were statements like 'Teachers put the kids on scab if they don't do it","... otherwise you would have to stay in to do it" and "I'll do it if the teacher threatens the class with detention". Scab duty was regarded as especially important, for it involved cleaning up the recess and lunch-time rubbish in all kinds of weather.

Of course, punishment is only relevant if one is caught, and students were quick to emphasize the importance of whether the teacher checked up on homework. If teachers did not check homework it was unlikely to be done. One student saw his teacher as "pretty slack" and noted that

> "Teachers set work but don't check it and in a way that's wrong. Sometimes they'll say 'Oh I'll be checking it tomorrow and you'll get a mark for it'. You do it and she doesn't check it and the next time you get homework you say she said that last time and she didn't check it, so you don't worry about it and then she gives a mark for the report."

This situation was acknowledged as quite widespread and was judged unfair by those students who *did* their homework :

> "They don't check it and I've spent all that time doing it. I get mad. The other kids who didn't do it, they're O.K. It makes me feel like not doing it."

The effect of checking homework was not merely that it motivated students to participate. It indicated that their teachers were concerned about

their work. It was a process of feedback and for some students it was evidence that their teachers were fulfilling their part of an implicit bargain. If students did their homework then the teachers' responsibility was to check it thoroughly, even if it placed additional pressure on their already stretched time.

On a more positive note, a number of students said that they did homework either because they liked the teacher or saw their demands as legitimate. One reported "a sense of responsibility to teachers as they have set it". Another said "he's a good teacher and therefore I work for him". However, these views were expressed by few students compared with those who were motivated by fear or the promise of better grades.

Parent influence

About two-thirds of the students said that their parents influenced them in one way or another to do homework. Most said that their parents regularly asked if they had homework, but such questions were regarded as ineffective unless accompanied by further probing, follow-through inquiries like "What do you mean by *no* homework?" or "What has to be finished by the end of the week?" Generally, parents were perceived to be highly concerned about homework. Students reported that this concern arose from their perception of a link between homework and employment, and from a desire that their children should be more successful than they have been. One boy reported :

> "My father did the wrong thing at school and found it hard to get a job. He expects to see an improvement and gives extra pocket-money if I do my homework."

In some cases this concern could not be translated into direct participation. Many parents, particularly those of European background, were unable to help because they had neither the language skills nor sufficient knowledge of the school system. Students reported that, where parents did not have the necessary background to check or help, they encouraged them, often with financial incentives. This was the case even where they did not approve of homework in principle :

> "My parents didn't think I should get homework. They encourage me to do it though, because they know you get graded on it. If it's before a test they think I should do it."

There were instances where apparently concern was expressed by excessive demands. One boy of Italian parentage reported that his father had earned "a lot of money by laying concrete very early in the morning till after dark, even in the week-ends". He said that his father made him work long hours too because "that was the way to do well at school or in anything."

Other influences on participation

For some students homework served as a recreational activity, keeping them busy after school. One commented that he had no friends in the area and had nothing better to do. Another reported that his parents had no television and that homework filled his after-school time. Another even regarded it as a "sort of hobby ... like collecting stamps", observing that he was so used to doing it that he couldn't go home and forget it. Several other students reported that they did it to compete with their peers. One said that by doing his homework he was able to "beat the know-alls in his class". Another admitted that she was jealous of her friends' grades and that homework helped her to improve her own.

Some students acknowledged that homework was necessary as a preparation for the demands of independent study in the upper school and that "by Year 11 and 12 you need to have got into the homework habit." A significant number of other students did homework because they acknowledged the need to finish off classwork. One observed that "a high school forty-minute period isn't long enough for some teachers to explain things, so they ask you to find out more about the topic." Many students were less generous in their comments. They complained that finishing off at home was necessary because their teachers had not controlled the class during the day :

> "Sometimes I think we get more work done out of school than during the day. If we got more done during the day, we wouldn't have to do so much homework."

and

> "The teacher cannot control the class and therefore we have to do work at home, which should've been done in class."

and

"We don't get much work done in class because we are mucking around too much, so we have a bit of finishing off to do at night."

REGULAR NON-PARTICIPATION

In these three schools most students tended to comply with homework demands. For the 1075 cases observed there was an 80 per cent response rate in maths, 75 per cent in social studies, and 60 per cent in English. Included in the non-participation group were students who had forgotten, who could not get resources, and who had left books at school but who might have otherwise complied. But there were also students who regularly disregarded homework demands. Twenty-seven of these students were selected from the group of non-participants. One of these students summed up her attitude by saying :

"I'm bored with school ... teachers telling you to do this, do that, treating you like dirt. It's blackmail. 'Do this or you'll be put on detention, do that or you'll be put on scab.'"

A number of these students have severe educational difficulties associated with boredom, school failure, negative attitudes and a complete disregard for homework, which they claimed had no value, and argued, "Even though you are forced to come to school ... you shouldn't be forced to do homework." They disliked school and were prepared to leave as soon as possible :

"I like to get home as soon as possible. When I get out of the school gates, I change completely."

Their interests lay outside the school context - in jobs, social life, cars, motor-bikes, surfing and anything else that wasn't school. Homework to this group was seen as something alien to everything they wanted to do and which they expected to be doing for the rest of their lives. The rejected any demands to extend the school day into their free time.

SOME PROBLEM AREAS

Students identified a number of areas where they felt change was necessary. The first related to the checking of homework and the imposition of threatened penalties. Most students agreed that

> "It isn't really fair if teachers don't check. They say it's for your own good and you'll learn more. But if they don't check you don't know how you've done or if you've learnt anything."

They went even further to suggest that any threats should be carried through to show that teachers were serious and really expected the work to be done.

> "If teachers want students to do homework they should check it and warn the kids that they'll give detention and carry it through."

They also pointed out that teachers' failure to check homework indirectly caused time to be wasted in class because work which had not been done at home had to be caught up in class. Time was wasted when teachers gave "periods to catch up on homework, and those who had done it did not have anything to do."

Another major area of concern was the perceived lack of co-ordination and planning by teachers in the overall homework programme. There were many comments to the effect that homework should be "spread out"; that on some nights there was no homework and that on other nights there was a lot.

> "It's terrible ... we get a lot of homework on one night and then none on the next. You do it all that night and find that you haven't got any on the next. There's not much you can do about it. You don't know what would be left over from a class."

Another commented :

> "If the teachers all knew what homework each one had given to the kids .. lots of time you can have no homework at all and the next night you might get homework from each subject and it has to be in the next day or next couple of days ... and some of the kids don't get it done. And it's only because they've studied more on one subject than another. Some of the teachers just say, 'Well that's the way it is and you've still got to do it.'"

Some students suggested that this lack of co-ordination between demands of different teachers and subjects might be overcome by

diaries or a home-work timetable that set nights and times for particular subjects and thus give a "structure which we know in advance" instead of "springing it on students". They suggested that this would also help offset the problem of "one teacher not knowing what the others are giving".

A further problem related to perceived relevance of homework. Some held an almost blind belief that teachers knew what was best for them and that "if teachers give homework, they must think we need it even though it looks boring." However, more than half the students said that many homework exercises were unnecessary, or that if they had some purpose their teachers did not explain what it was. One boy complained that "they just say to do this and hand it in and never explain why we should be doing it." Another observed that he "couldn't see the sense in some of the homework ... and teachers should figure out what we honestly need to do."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Very few students described homework as something that they enjoyed. However, with the exception of those who had rejected it along with the rest of schooling, most students were prepared to do homework under sufferance, even if they could not see its point. Their motivation was most often marks, reports and the desire to keep out of trouble with teachers and parents. Because homework was seldom enjoyed, it was not done for teachers who were regarded as "slack" and who did not check it or carry out their threats. This was especially the case where the value and purpose of the homework exercise had not been clarified. Once homework had been set, most students wanted teachers to enforce the rules, to check work, to make them accountable and to punish non-compliance. Teachers' failure to do these things violated their sense of justice and contradicted any notion that the homework was worth setting in the first place. Another thing which offended students' sense of justice was having to do homework that they felt could have been completed in school had time not been wasted in class.

The problems mentioned most often related to inconsistent demands upon out-of-school time. Most students acknowledged that uneven homework loads were often a result of their own inability to plan

and organize their time, but they argued that this was exacerbated by demands "sprung on them" with little warning or recognition of their commitments including jobs, sports training and other out-of-school interests.

Students' comments about their parents' attitudes indicated that within many families there was agreement about the reasons for doing homework. These were pragmatic; homework should be done for marks, employment and to keep out of trouble, rather than for any intrinsic value it may have.

Chapter 10

PARENTS' VIEWS

This section reports on the survey of 30 parents of students in the three schools as shown in Table 3 (Chapter 3). Their views on a number of homework issues were sought through personal interviews conducted in their homes. The interviews focused on a range of issues, including the kind of help they believed they should give their children, the value they perceived in homework, and the time they felt should be devoted to home study. Each interview was structured in terms of the schedule presented in Appendix 4.

Parents generally reported that their children seldom asked for assistance with homework. This observation was supported by the earlier survey data, which indicated that over 80 per cent of students reported that they "never" or only "sometimes" asked their parents for help. Parents said that when help was given it was usually in English, social studies, or mathematics. No parent reported any involvement in science, thus further conforming the survey data, which indicated that in these particular schools science was not a significant aspect of the Year 9 homework programme. In most cases parents helped by discussing ideas, helping find resources, and by clarifying points of difficulty. All parents felt that they should be available to help where possible and provide a physical contest appropriate for home study. Several saw their role as controlling external influences such as television and social activities, and keeping household chores to a minimum. Most parents were uncertain about the extent to which they should control these external influences because they were not clear about how much time their children should be spending on homework. Moreover, when their children claimed to have no homework they knew of no way of validating that claim.

Although there was a general willingness to assist with homework, parents were aware that they had first to understand what their children were learning. In some subjects parents felt that the curriculum had changed so dramatically that they were unable to give any constructive help. This was particularly true of mathematics. The majority shared the view that "as long as parents know the correct ways of doing the work then they can help, but if they don't, then they are just a hindrance." In the case of the eight migrant families

included in the interviews, the problem of unfamiliar curriculum was exacerbated by language difficulties. These parents, who did not speak English in the home, reported that their children rarely asked them for help because they knew that they were unable to provide it.

Most parents set limits upon the amount of assistance they were prepared to give. They were prepared to check work, to discuss problems and clarify issues, but not to give the answers. One father observed that "provided it is not a cop-out on his part we would nut out a problem, discuss ideas, but not give him the answer." Most parents perceived some value in homework. Several observed that it allowed their children more time to explore problems and difficulties encountered during the school day and gave parents the chance to explain points of difficulty. For the majority homework simply meant the opportunity to consolidate and practise work begun in school. Most felt that teachers progressed through the curriculum so quickly that homework was necessary to allow revision, consolidation and extra time to keep up with the demands of classwork. Some parents even considered that there were so many distractions at school that their children learned more at home than in class. There was also a general acceptance of the view that homework participation enhanced school achievement and "if homework is not done it will reflect in grades and final reports". Several parents also believed that homework encouraged good study habits that would "stand them in good stead for what was to come in the higher grades" (i.e. later years). Although most of these parents perceived some value in homework, several were sceptical. One observed that "if so much time wasn't wasted during the school day, then homework wouldn't be necessary at all". He continued that homework conflicted with many of the other activities children ought to be encouraged to pursue in their own time. He felt that "six hours at school was a sufficient time for learning, and work after school was an imposition on students' private time". Generally, however, most parents accepted homework in moderation. The majority therefore actively encouraged their children to participate in homework. Those who did not either felt that they no longer needed to encourage their children "actively" because a steady homework routine had already been established or, in a minority of cases, felt that they should not endorse something that had no value. The most frequently mentioned forms of encouragement were the provision of a quiet work-

place and the checking and praising of completed work. Other parents helped their children estimate the time various exercises would take so that deadlines could be met. Several parents expressed a sense of frustration that they were unable to provide appropriate encouragement and help. In one family both parents were music teachers, and their busiest time was immediately after school, when their daughter wanted to do homework. Another working couple observed that they were "too mentally and physically tired at the end of the day to get too involved in homework" although they felt that they should be helping more. Others expressed frustration because of their limited knowledge of the curriculum and the appropriate standards of work. One observed that "what I think is good work might be failed by his teacher so how do I know when to say it is good or enough?"

Parents were also asked whether they encouraged their children to do private study such as reading and revision that had not been formally set by the teacher. Although some did try to encourage this kind of homework, all expressed a sense of defeat about it. As one father reported, "The boys believe that if the teachers do not set homework then it is not worth doing anything else." He went on to observe that, because there was no way of really knowing what tests were coming up at school or what deadlines had to be met, it was difficiult to argue that any revision was necessary.

All but one family felt that their children should do some homework and their preferences ranged from an hour (10 families), 1½ hours (10 families) through to 2 hours (9 families). Several parents argued that some children needed to spend longer on homework to improve their grades. Where, for example, a child was experiencing problems in mathematics, more practice and drill sessions at home were appropriate, whereas a child who was having no problems at school might need to do very little homework. This view was in direct conflict with the practices described elsewhere in this report, which indicated that lower-achieving students were generally expected to do little or no homework.

For most of the families, homework did not cause major problems in the home. It was an accepted, integral part of household routine and children seemed to "just get on and do it". However, about one-third of the families concerned indicated that homework did cause problems. These revolved largely around the conflict of interests between homework and family routine and commitments. In one instance parents had been forced to cancel their Easter vacation arrangements

because their daughter had too many assignments to complete. There was also conflict between homework demands and parents' need for help around the house. Few parents were prepared to press their claims over those of homework, but were nevertheless frustrated. One father observed that his son "has never got homework until you ask him to give his mother a hand, and then he suddenly has an assignment to finish". Several parents noted conflict between other school commitments and homework. One parent who was uncertain about what actually constituted homework commented that his child was expected to go to plays, watch prescribed TV programmes *and* do homework. A major conflict also existed between the demands of sports training and homework. Almost one-third of the parents complained that after late and strenuous training sessions their children were "in no fit state to do anything else but have dinner and collapse into bed". An example of these "overload" problems was the situation described by one mother, who reported that her son

> "does not come home until 5.30-6 p.m. on Wednesdays because of school band practice. He is out by 7.00 to attend chess practice, and is home by 11 p.m. Since his social and other commitments prevent him from doing much homework at night, he crams it all into his lunch-hour, Sunday nights and a few all-night weekday marathon sessions. That is why his assignments are late, if he manages to do them. He consistently does between a quarter and half hour of trumpet practice each day."

Report time was the most common occasion for argument between parents and children. In several instances school reports had referred to incomplete homework when parents were under the impression that their children had been doing sufficient. In such cases parents were confused and uncertain of homework requirements and felt that the school should have kept them better informed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

These parents generally agreed that homework had an important role to play in their children's education. There were exceptions, where parents believed that the hours of study during the school day were sufficient and that homework was an imposition on their children's private time. Frustration and uncertainty were evident in many of the parents' comments. This arose from a lack of understanding of the school curriculum, and poor school-home communication about

homework. Frustration also derived from the conflict between parents' desire to be involved in the homework process and their inability to contribute by virtue of their own work and leisure commitments, fatigue, and lack of relevant educational background.

Chapter 11

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The major conclusions about homework in Year 9 *in the three Perth schools studied* are as follows:

(1) There is a very wide *range* in the time that different students spend on homework. At the Year 9 level the weekly time spent on each of the four core subjects ranges from *none* by about one-third of the students to over two hours by 10 to 15 per cent of students depending on the subject. *Average* homework times therefore should be interpreted very cautiously, for there are many students who do no homework and a smaller number who do a great deal. Generally, however, homework does not place heavy demands on students' time in these schools when compared with other out-of-school commitments. Most of these children spend more time each *night* in front of television than they average for a whole week on homework.

(2) The great variation between students' out-of-class study time suggests that homework time and participation are factors of great significance in explaining variation in secondary school achievement and that educational research on the relationship between variables such as allocated time and school achievement should be extended to out-of-class learning contexts. Further research should clearly distinguish between the concepts of homework time and participation as they have emerged in this study, for pupils may record low homework times but always participate when homework is set.

(3) An important reason why there is such a large range in the amount of *time* spent by students is that low achievers are set very little or none. This is because most teachers believe that low achievers are incapable of working independently, or that there is no need to extend them, or that they can cover the less-demanding curriculum during the school day, or that students won't do it if it *is* set. Many parents, on the other hand, see these low achievers as being the very ones who should be spending regular time on homework as one means of overcoming their weaknesses.

(4) The extent to which students respond to teachers' homework expectations is not associated with their social background. This is at odds with a widespread belief that children from lower SES backgrounds participate less in homework. However, the result should be interpreted cautiously, for SES is a difficult variable to measure. Furthermore, the Perth metropolitan schools concerned did not contain the extremes of SES disadvantage that have been related to lower levels of educational involvement in large urban centres elsewhere.

(5) Low achievers spend much less time on homework, but this appears to be associated more with teachers' lower homework expectations than with students' unwillingness to do homework. Although teachers argue that they set less homework because low achievers do not do it, the observed relationships between students' achievement levels and *participation* in most subjects in this study are not strong; low achievers tend to do homework when it *is* set as readily as higher achievers.

(6) Teachers' unwillingness to set homework for low achievers may exacerbate pupils' learning difficulties and contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy of continued low achievement.

(7) There is little change in the amount of homework done as students progress from Year 8 to Year 10. There is no school policy - one that might be appropriate at different grade levels, or in different subject areas - that makes explicit the homework programme.

(8) Lack of general school policy arises from administrators' and senior teachers' unwillingness to encroach upon what they perceive as an area of professional autonomy of their staff - the right to set or not to set homework. This reluctance contrasts with the view of most administrators that homework has value and that teachers should set it regularly on time-based guidelines. Teachers generally perceive no official school policy on homework.

(9) Few students enjoy doing homework and do it mainly because it counts for grades, reports and ultimately for employment.

They are much more likely to do it if they think it will be checked and if teachers clearly explain its purpose and relevance. There is great variation in teachers homework-related behaviour and this variation is reflected in pupils' participation rates. Where teachers plan homework as an integral part of the lesson or series of lessons, spend time structuring and explaining the exercises, ultimately follow them through and use them as a basis for diagnosis or assessment, student participation rates tend to be higher. Teacher education programmes might well take account of this.

(10) Students complain that homework demands are uneven and unco-ordinated, and that this makes it difficult to plan and organize for other out-of-school commitments such as sport, part-time jobs, music practice and social and family engagements.

(11) Most teachers see homework as a strategy for covering the curriculum, particularly with higher-achieving groups, and use it mainly to allow students to finish off classwork, to consolidate, and to research longer topics. The finishing-off role of homework also helps teachers to cater for differences between pupils' work rates. Teachers set very few preparatory or exploratory exercises because few pupils complete them, thus causing differing levels of pupil entry behaviour to new topics.

(12) Most parents are as pragmatic as their children about homework. They generally support and encourage their children because they, too, see its relevance for assessment, reports and employment. However, they also perceive that homework has an important role in their children's education, particularly for low achievers, who they see as needing additional revision and drill. They express widespread frustration with their unfamiliarity with the curriculum and with their own social and occupational commitments, which often do not allow them to provide the support they feel is necessary. Many also express frustration about schools' failure to communicate policy and homework guidelines.

The major conclusions about homework in Year 11 *in the two Perth schools studied* are as follows :

(1) There is a significant increase in the amount of homework *time* in Year 11 compared with Year 10. In one of the schools the average weekly time increased from 8.4 hours to 15.2 hours, and in the other school it increased from 7.1 hours to 12.8 hours.

(2) The amount of variation in homework time among students in the upper school is markedly lower than that in the lower secondary school.

(3) Students taking Mathematics II and III and who were classified as higher achievers averaged 25.7 hours homework per week (standard deviation only 4.7!). This represents an average school programme of over 50 hours per week for this 15-16 year old group, apart from their other activities such as sport, music, jobs, and social and family commitments. Few adults are expected to cope with a work-load of that magnitude.

Lower-achieving groups taking no mathematics or Mathematics IV* averaged 16.9 and 19.4 hours respectively, giving them a weekly study commitment of between 42 and 46 hours. Year 11 thus represents a major adjustment by students in terms of the demands upon 'free' time and their capacity for independent study.

(4) The above conclusions further emphasize the potential relevance of homework *time* as a factor in school learning. As homework time is equal to or greater than allocated *in*-school time for many upper secondary school students, it is puzzling that this variable has been so widely neglected by educational researchers.

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*The least demanding mathematics programme.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaires for case studies relating to homework participation and non-participation. Note that B1.1 and B2.2 were answered only by participants, and B1 and B2 were answered only by non-participants.

PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

PART A: ABOUT YOU:

What is your name? .....

How old are you? .... years .... months

What is your sex? (Circle appropriate answer). Male/Female

How many older brothers and sisters do you have? .....

How many younger brothers and sisters do you have? .....

What is your father's job (say what he actually does). .....
.....

What is your mother's job (say what she actually does). .....
.....

In which country was your mother born? .....

In which country was your father born? .....

Which language is normally spoken in your home? (e.g. English, Italian etc.) .....

Which of the following people live at home with you? (Tick boxes)

Your mother	
Your father	
Older brother (s)	
Older sister (s)	
Younger brother (s)	
Younger sister (s)	
Grandparent (s)	
Other people	

My achievement level in this subject is .....

Please answer these questions if you did your homework. This includes trying to do it, but not finishing it.

NAME: SUBJECT: TEACHER:

PART B: ABOUT THIS HOMEWORK EXERCISE WHICH YOU DID

1.a. About how much time altogether did you spend on this homework exercise?
(Tick one of the spaces).

less than 15 mins.	☐
15 to 30 mins.	☐
30 to 45 mins.	☐
45 to 60 mins.	☐
If more than 1 hr. say how much time	☐

b. Where did you do your homework? (Tick one box)

At home		☐
At school	a) in subject class time	☐
	b) other school time	☐
Part at home, part at school		☐

Elsewhere (say where) .....

2. What help did you get with this homework? (Tick any of the boxes which apply to you).

I needed help but couldn't get any	☐
I didn't need help	☐
mother helped	☐
father helped	☐
brother or sister helped	☐
class friend (s) helped	☐

Please name anyone else who helped you .....

3. IF YOU DID GET HELP, HOW MUCH did you receive? (Tick one).

it was checked after I finished	☐
some of it was done for me	☐
most of it was done for me	☐
all of it was done for me	☐

In the box below, SAY WHAT KIND OF HELP you had, e.g. parents gave ideas, corrected mistakes and you then fixed it up etc.

.....

.....

.....

4. Who would you usually go to for help in this subject? .....

Why would you go to that person rather than someone else? .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Did you think that your teacher would check to see if you had done it? (Put circle around one).

DEFINITELY YES	PROBABLY	DON'T KNOW	PROBABLY NO	DEFINITELY NO

6. In the pace below state briefly why you think the teacher set this homework exercise. If you don't know, PLEASE SAY SO.

.....

.....

.....

7. What did you learn by doing this homework exercise?

.....

.....

.....

.....

NAME: SUBJECT:

TEACHER:

PART B: ABOUT THIS HOMEWORK EXERCISE WHICH YOU DID NOT DO.

1. There are lots of reasons why people don't do their homework. Why didn't you do it? (Tick any of the following reasons which applied to you for this particular homework exercise).

I wasn't at school when it was given	☐
I was at school but didn't know we had to do it.	☐
I forgot about it; or I forgot to take my books home	☐
I didn't do it because the topic didn't interest me	☐
I had too much other homework	☐
I had too many jobs to do around the house	☐
I didn't understand how to do it	☐
I didn't have enough reference books	☐

If there was any other reason why you didn't do it, write it in the space below:

ALSO I didn't do it because (please state any other reasons)

.....

.....

.....

2. Did you think that your teacher would check to see if you had done it? (Put circle around one).

DEFINITELY YES	PROBABLY	DON'T KNOW	PROBABLY NO	DEFINITELY NO

3. If you had needed help with this homework, who would you have been able to ask? List any people, such as brothers, sisters, friends.
IF THERE WAS NO-ONE YOU COULD ASK PLEASE SAY SO.

I would have been able to get help from .....

.....

.....

.....

Why would you have asked that person? .....

.....

.....

.....

4. In the space below state briefly why you think the teacher set this homework exercise? IF YOU DON'T KNOW, PLEASE SAY SO.

.....

.....

.....

PART C : ABOUT HOMEWORK IN GENERAL

1. HOW OFTEN do you get halp from these people? (Circle appropriate answers).

MOTHER	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
FATHER	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
BROTHER OR SISTER	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
OTHER CLASS MEMBERS	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
OTHER FRIENDS	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
YOUR TEACHERS	Mathematics	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	English	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Social Studies	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Science	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

2.a. Do your parents care whether you do your homework? (Circle appropriate answer).

Mother	Not alive	Does not live at home	Doesn't care	Cares a bit	Cares quite a lot	Cares very much
Father	Not alive	Does not live at home	Doesn't care	Cares a bit	Cares quite a lot	Cares very much

b. Does anybody else ever tell you to do your homework? (If so, say who it is in the space below).

3. In the space below describe the PLACE where you usually do your homework. Say whether it is quiet or noisy, comfortable or uncomfortable, whether you can concentrate, and so on.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. During the weekend, how long on the average do you spend on homework? (Tick one box).

- Usually no time ☐
- up to 1 hr. ☐
- between 1 & 2 hrs. ☐
- between 2 & 3 hrs. ☐
- between 3 & 4 hrs. ☐
- over 4 hrs. ☐

5. On <u>each</u> night from Monday to Friday how long on the average do you spend on homework? (Tick one box).

- Usually no time ☐
- Up to ½ hr. ☐
- ½ hr. to 1 hr. ☐
- 1 hr. to 1½ hrs. ☐
- 1½ hrs. to 2 hrs. ☐
- over 2 hrs. ☐

6. On each night from Monday to Friday how much T.V. do you usually watch? (Tick one box).

- Usually none ☐
- Up to 1 hr. ☐
- up to 2 hrs. ☐
- up to 3 hrs. ☐
- more than 3 hrs. ☐

7. Which T.V. programmes do you usually watch?

MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	
SUNDAY	

8. Do you do your homework watching T.V.? (Circle answer)

ALWAYS OFTEN SOMETIMES NEVER

9. Do you play sport or go to training after school? If you do, say how long you usually spend doing it on each day.

MONDAY	hour (s)
TUESDAY	hour (s)
WEDNESDAY	hour (s)
THURSDAY	hour (s)
FRIDAY	hour (s)
SATURDAY	hour (s)
SUNDAY	hour (s)

10. Do you have a paid job before or after school? (CIRCLE answer) YES/NO

If you have a paid job what is it? .....

In the space below say how long you work at your paid job each day.

MONDAY	hour (s)
TUESDAY	hour (s)
WEDNESDAY	hour (s)
THURSDAY	hour (s)
FRIDAY	hour (s)
SATURDAY	hours (s)
SUNDAY	hours (s)

11. How often do you cook or help to cook the dinner at night? (CIRCLE answer)

NEVER | HARDLY EVER | SOMETIMES | MOSTLY | ALWAYS

12. How often do you wash up or help with the washing up after dinner at night. (CIRCLE answer)

NEVER | HARDLY EVER | SOMETIMES | MOSTLY | ALWAYS

13. On <u>each</u> night from Monday to Friday, how long on the average do you spend on JOBS AROUND THE HOUSE, such as shopping, washing clothes, gardening, housecleaning etc.

MONDAY	hour (s)
TUESDAY	hour (s)
WEDNESDAY	hour (s)
THURSDAY	hour (s)
FRIDAY	hour (s)

APPENDIX 2

Student Interview Schedules

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE A

(To be used with students who had done some or all of the homework)

NAME: ..... CLASS: .....

You'll remember that I've been working in the school looking at students' problems in, and attitudes towards, homework, and you helped us in the study by completing a couple of questionnaires.

What I'd like to talk about now are your own ideas on homework, what you think about it and why you do it if you do, or if you don't do homework then why you don't.

Now I see from the questionnaire that you did do the homework exercise set by the teacher. (Refresh student's memory as to which exercise we are referring to).

Can you tell me what your reasons were for doing that exercise?

Parental pressure.	☐
Teacher pressure.	☐
Fear of failure	☐
Interested in topic	☐
Likes the subject	☐
Other	☐

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE B

(To be used with students who had not done the homework exercise)

NAME: ..... CLASS: .....

You'll remember that I've been working in the school looking at students' problems in, and attitudes towards, homework, and you helped us in the study by completing a couple of questionnaires.

What I'd like to talk about now are your own ideas on homework, what you think about it and why you do it if you do, or if you don't do homework then why you don't/

Now I see from the questionnaire that you did not do the homework exercise set by the teacher. (Refresh student's memory as to which exercise we are referring to).

Can you tell me what were your reasons for not doing the homework?

No time ☐

Too much other homework. ☐

Forgot. ☐

Topic not of interest. ☐

Do not like subject. ☐

Too difficult. ☐

Did not understand. ☐

Other. ☐

HOMEWORK IN GENERAL

Now let's turn to homework in general. Would you say that you normally do your homework in other subjects? .....

.....

Can you describe for me your reasons for doing homework in your four core subjects.

English	Social Studies	Maths	Science	Other

If there are times when you wouldn't do your homework, can you tell me the sorts of reasons you'd have for *not doing* it.

Reason	English	Social Studies	Maths.	Science
Too busy				
Not interested in topic				
Don't like subject				
Don't like teacher				
Too hard				
Don't understand				

iii. CHANGES IN HOMEWORK

We are interested in any ideas students may have on how homework could be improved. If you were asked to give your advice, what suggestions would you like to make?

Changes in Time	
Type	
Teaching Behaviour	

Prompt if necessary.

Some students don't do homework: why, do you think this happens?

.....

.....

.....

What kind of homework are you most likely to do? .....

.....

.....

.....

For students who do not do homework

Let's assume for one moment that homework will not be scrapped however much you would like that to happen. What kind of changes would need to be made to encourage you to do homework? .....

.....

.....

.....

What do you think is the function of homework? .....

.....

.....

.....

GENERAL COMMENTS

APPENDIX 3

Teacher Interview Schedules

GENERAL (Teacher Interview)

1. Of the following types of homework, which would be set in Year 9? (in rank order if possible).

Finish off	☐
Preparation	☐
Research-Enrichment	☐
Revision	☐
Other	☐

2. Does this school have a homework policy regarding how much time should be spent on various subjects each night?

3. How much time do you think these pupils should spend on homework in all subjects?

Monday through Friday	.....
Weekends	.....

4. What role, if any, do you think parents can play in homework in your subject at this level?

5. What about parents' roles further up the secondary school?

6. What other comments would you like to make about homework generally.

TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Specific)

NAME: ..... SUBJECT: .....

SCHOOL: ..... CASE STUDY: .....

TEACHING EXPERIENCE: ..... AGE: .... SEX: MALE/FEMALE

The Specific Homework assignment

1. What was your purpose in setting this particular exercise?

Finish off ☐

Preparation ☐

Research-enrichment ☐

Revision ☐

Other .....

2. Was the homework exercise started in class?

3. How long do you think that they would have spent on this particular exercise? (note average and/or range).

.....

4.a (If it was to be done before the next class lesson)

What other homework did these children have in other subjects while they were doing this exercise?

b (If it was an assignment or longer piece of research)

What other assignments were they doing in other subjects while they were doing this one?

5. Did you check to see if they had done this homework? How?

6. Did it contribute to their formal assessment for Achievement Certificate? (where appropriate).

7. How many times have you set homework in this Year 9 Class over the last 3 weeks? (Ask teacher to refer to records).

.....

8. What were these homework task (s) ?

(i) .... hours

(ii) .... hours

(iii) .... hours

(iv) .... hours

(v) .... hours

9 Other comments.

APPENDIX 4

Parent Interview Schedules

PARENT INTERVIEWS

PERSONAL DETAILS

	Mother	Father
Age :		
Occupation :		
School attainment :		
Qualifications :		

1. How long does your son/daughter spend on homework on the average, during the weekend?

Usually no time	☐
Up to 1 hour	☐
between 1 and 2 hours	☐
between 2 and 3 hours	☐
between 3 and 4 hours	☐
over 4 hours	☐
Do not know	☐

2. How long does your son/daughter spend on homework on each night from Monday to Friday?

Usually no time	☐
up to ½ hour	☐
½ hour to 1 hour	☐
1 hour to 1½ hours	☐
1½ hours to 2 hours	☐
over 2 hours	☐
Do not know	☐

3. Does you son/daughter ever seek assistance from you?

	Mother	Father
never	☐	☐
sometimes	☐	☐
often	☐	☐
always	☐	☐

4. If yes, in which subjects?

	Mother	Father
English		
Social Studies		
Science		
Mathematics		
Other		

5. What sort of help is given?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Discuss ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
find resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
does some or all of homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
checks the homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Do you think that your son/daughter should get help from you?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. If yes, what sort of help?

.....

.....

.....

8. If you son/daughter does not seek assistance why not?

	Mother	Father
Does not do homework	☐	☐
does not need help	☐	☐
parents unable to help	☐	☐
do not believe parents should help	☐	☐
parents not available to help	☐	☐
other	☐	☐

9. Do you think homework has any value for your son/daughter.

to get better job ☐

keep off streets ☐

something to do ☐

improve grades ☐

keep out of trouble at school ☐

other ☐

no value ☐

10. Do you encourage your son/daughter to do homework?

Yes ☐ No ☐

In what way .....

.....

.....

11. Do you encourage your son/daughter to do private study? (e.g. reading, revision not set by teacher)

Yes ☐ No ☐

12. How much time do you think your son/daughter should be spending on homework per night?

Do time ☐

up to ½ hour ☐

½ hour - 1 hour ☐

1 hour - 1½ hour ☐

1½ hour - 2 hours ☐

over 2 hours ☐

13. What are the major problems which homework causes in your home?

.....

.....

.....

14. What are the major problems for your son/daughter?

.....

.....

.....

15. Have you had any contact with the school in the last three months?

Parents evening ☐

personal interview ☐

other ☐

no contact ☐

16. When was the last time you had contact with the school?

.....

.....

.....

17. What are your hopes for your son/daughter when he/she leaves school? (Job/further studies?)

.....

.....

.....

Sibling Support

18. Do you have other relatives living with you?

Son (s) ☐

Daughter(s) ☐

Parent(s) ☐

Other relative(s) ☐

19. Do they help your son/daughter with homework? (State whom.)

Never	☐
sometimes	☐
often	☐
always	☐

20. What sort of help is given?

Discuss ideas	☐
find resources	☐
does some or all of homework	☐
other	☐

Other comments.

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your co-operation.

APPENDIX 5

Years 8 - 10 Diary

HOMEWORK DIARY

To the Student

This homework diary is part of an investigation being conducted by the University of W.A. and the Education Department of W.A. into the amount of school homework which secondary school pupils do each day. The aim of the survey is to obtain an accurate picture of how much homework is done by pupils in different subjects in the various years of secondary school. Homework here means work which your teachers expect you to do, including such things as assignments, reading, revision and finishing off work which you did not complete in class. In other words it is all work which you have to do outside the class time in each of your subjects.

At the end of each day for one week you are asked to spend a few minutes recording the following information on the time-table provided:

(i) The subject or subjects in which any homework was done.

(ii) The amount of time spent on each subject concerned.

(iii) The word 'NONE' if you did no homework on a particular day.

Please be as accurate as possible in estimating the time spent by checking the time you start and finish work in each subject.

It is emphasized that your responses will be completely anonymous.

Example of a Completed Diary

HOMEWORK DIARY

Your Class: 10.2 Sex (circle one) Female/(Male)

Mother's occupation: Housewife Father's occupation Motor mechanic (works for himself)

Your intended occupation (if known) Carpenter

	MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time
Homework done in school time (spare periods, library etc)	English	10 mins	Maths	35 mins	None	–	Science	20 mins	Tech Drew	10 mins	None	–	English Maths	70 mins 5 mins
Homework done outside school time	None	–	Soc Studies Maths	20 mins 30 mins	None	–	English Manual arts Maths	30 mins 20 mins 30 mins	Soc Studies	45 mins				

HOMEWORK DIARY

Your Class: _____ Sex (circle one) Female/Male

Mother's occupation: _____ Father's occupation _____

Your intended occupation (if known) _____

	MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time	Subject	Time
Homework done in school time (spare periods, library etc)														
Homework done outside school time														

APPENDIX 6

Year 11 Diary

HOMEWORK DIARY

To the Student

This homework diary is part of an investigation being conducted by the University of W.A. and the Education Department of W.A. into the amount of school homework which secondary school pupils do each day. The aim of the survey is to obtain an accurate picture of how much homework is done by pupils in different subjects in the various years of secondary school. Homework here means work which your teachers expect you to do, including such things as assignments, reading, revision and finishing off work which you did not complete in class. In other words it is all work which you have to do outside the class time in each of your subjects.

At the end of each day for one week you are asked to spend a few minutes recording the following information on the time-table provided:

(i) The subject or subjects in which any homework was done.

(ii) The amount of time spent on each subject concerned.

(iii) The word 'NONE' if you did no homework on a particular day.

Please be as accurate as possible in estimating the time spent by checking the time you start and finish work in each subject.

It is emphasized that your responses will be completely anonymous.

Example of a Completed Diary

HOMEWORK DIARY

Your Class: 10.2 Sex (circle one) Female/(Male)

Mother's occupation: Housewife Father's occupation: Motor mechanic (works for himself)

Your intended occupation (if known): Carpenter

Week 1

	Subject code	Subject name	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Total
	01	English	15	None	None	20	5	—	—	40
	20	Maths I	None	None	15	20	None	—	—	35
	23	Biology	None	None	None	None	5	—	—	5
	29	Art	None	None	10	None	5	—	—	15
	32	Politics	10	None	5	None	None	—	—	15
	36	Hum. Biol	10	None	5	5	None	—	—	20
										130
	01	English	None	30	20	None	10	30	None	90
	20	Maths I	30	None	None	10	None	None	10	50
	23	Biology	10	None	None	None	30	None	None	40
	29	Art	None	None	20	None	10	None	20	50
	32	Politics	None	50	None	20	None	10	None	80
	36	Hum. Biol	20	10	20	30	None	None	None	80
										390
								Total week 1		520

Subjects and code numbers

01	English
02	Chinese
03	Dutch
04	French
05	German
06	Greek
07	Hebrew
08	Italian
09	Indonesian
10	Japanese
11	Latin
12	Malay
13	Russian
14	Spanish
15	Economics
16	English Literature
17	Geography
18	History
19	Music
20	Mathematics I
21	Mathematics II
22	Mathematics III
27	Mathematics IV
23	Biology
24	Chemistry
25	Geology
26	Physics
28	Agricultural Science
29	Art
30	Music (AMEB)
31	Speech and Drama
32	Politics
35	Home Economics
36	Human Biology
38	Physiology and Hygiene
39	Project Physics
46	Stenography
48	Technical Drawing
49	Applied Technology
50	Accounting

HOMEWORK DIARY

Your Class: _____ Sex (circle one) : Female/Male

Mother's occupation: _____ Father's occupation _____

Your intended occupation (if known): _____

Subjects for 1980	
Subject	Mark/100 last exam
Best 5 aggregate:	

			Week 1								Week 2								
	Subject Code	Subject Name	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total	Total Wk1+Wk2
Homework done in school time (spare periods, library, etc.)																			
Homework done outside school time																			151
		Total Wk.1:										Total Wk.2:							

150

APPENDIX 7

Year 9: Average Weekly Hours on Homework
According to SES Background and School

Appendix 7. Year 9: Average weekly hours on homework according to SES background and school

SES Level	School											
	Berry Mount			Mill Town			Cedar Brook			Newton		
	mean	sd.	n	mean	sd.	n	mean	sd.	n	mean	sd.	n
1 (High)	-	-	0	7.2	5.1	17	3.6	2.5	17	7.4	2.6	10
2	3.1	3.03	13	7.3	6.4	12	3.4	1.6	11	6.3	4.2	16
3	2.1	1.3	12	2.9	2.3	3	4.4	0.8	6	7.3	5.0	10
4	2.9	2.8	18	4.1	4.3	9	-	-	-	4.6	2.6	3
5	1.7	1.9	5	2.8	0	1	1.7	1.3	2	-	-	-
6	2.7	4.0	10	8.4	5.9	8	3.0	0	1	5.5	-	1
7-9 (Low)	4.2	2.8	2	2.7	1.5	5	2.0	1.4	2	6.5	5.6	2

APPENDICES 8-11

Years 8-10: Average Weekly Homework Time
According to Achievement Level

Appendix 8. English: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year and Achievement Level. (N = 367)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	.2	.4	7	.8	.9	8	.7	.4	7	22
	Int.	1.1	1.4	4	.4	.6	26	.5	.8	32	62
	Basic	.3	.0	1	.7	.9	2	.1	.3	8	11
Mill Town	Adv.	1.6	1.2	13	1.0	1.3	11	1.3	1.4	14	38
	Int.	.4	.3	9	.6	1.2	13	.4	.6	19	41
	Basic	.2	.0	1	.1	.2	3	.6	.2	7	11
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.8	1.7	10	1.1	1.4	15	1.0	.9	17	42
	Int.	.3	.5	15	.4	.7	17	1.8	2.5	21	53
	Basic	.0	.0	3	.4	.5	5	.7	1.5	4	12
Newton	Adv.	1.5	1.4	5	1.1	1.2	15	.2	.3	6	26
	Int.	.8	.3	2	1.3	1.4	24	.3	.3	9	35
	Basic	1.3	1.2	-	.6	.0	1	.0	.0	1	2
Total:				70			140			145	355

Appendix 9. Mathematics: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year and Achievement Level. (N = 367)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	1.0	1.0	10	.8	.6	14	.6	.7	16	40
	Ord.	-	-	-	.8	.7	15	.1	.1	8	23
	Elem.	.6	.5	9	.5	.2	5	.2	.5	14	28
	Basic	.2	.4	2	.0	.0	2	.1	.2	10	14
Mill Town	Adv.	1.6	.7	13	1.0	1.5	13	2.2	1.4	12	38
	Ord.	1.5	1.3	6	1.4	1.0	12	.6	.9	13	31
	Elem.	2.4	1.2	3	.6	.3	2	1.3	.7	5	10
	Basic	.3	.0	1	.0	.0	1	.4	.6	10	12
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.7	.6	12	1.1	.8	20	3.6	1.8	22	54
	Ord.	.9	.3	11	1.1	.6	10	2.0	1.4	10	31
	Elem.	.9	1.6	5	.7	.6	6	.9	.7	9	20
	Basic	.8	.0	1	.2	.0	1	1.7	.3	2	4
Newton	Adv.	1.4	1.4	6	1.1	.7	21	1.7	.9	11	38
	Ord.	-	-	-	1.4	.9	12	.8	.1	2	14
	Elem.	1.1	.0	1	1.1	.8	6	1.2	1.3	2	9
	Basic	-	-	0	.7	.0	1	-	-	0	1
Total:				80			141			146	367

Appendix 10. Social Studies: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year, and Achievement Level. (N = 352)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	.4	.2	5	1.1	.8	10	.6	.5	9	24
	Int.	.5	.0	1	.6	1.1	19	.4	.8	27	47
	Basic	.4	.5	3	.0	.0	2	.2	.3	12	17
Mill Town	Adv.	1.1	1.2	18	2.6	2.4	14	3.2	2.8	12	44
	Int.	.8	1.0	3	.7	1.1	13	1.4	1.5	19	35
	Basic	.2	.3	2	.0	.0	1	.7	.7	9	12
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.2	.5	15	.6	.5	15	2.8	3.5	16	46
	Int.	.3	.3	12	.7	.8	19	2.6	3.5	24	55
	Basic	.9	1.3	2	1.0	1.0	3	.3	.6	3	8
Newton	Adv.	2.7	2.6	6	1.5	1.4	24	1.1	1.2	11	41
	Int.	.6	.0	1	1.1	1.0	17	1.0	.8	5	23
	Basic	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-
Total:				68			137			147	352

Appendix 11. Science: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year, and Achievement Level. (N = 364)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	.1	.2	7	1.1	1.3	15	.5	.5	8	30
	Int.	.1	.3	8	.5	.5	18	.3	.4	33	59
	Basic	.2	.3	3	.1	.1	2	.8	1.1	8	13
Mill Town	Adv.	3.2	1.9	14	2.6	2.9	12	2.1	2.5	14	40
	Int.	.2	.2	6	.8	.9	14	1.1	1.2	18	38
	Basic	.6	.7	3	.4	.0	1	.3	.6	8	12
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.3	.3	13	.3	.5	18	.8	.9	16	47
	Int.	.3	.5	14	.3	.3	15	.9	1.6	23	52
	Basic	.2	.3	2	.1	.1	4	.2	.2	4	10
Newton	Adv.	.7	.7	6	2.1	.9	23	3.9	2.9	10	39
	Int.	.0	.0	1	.5	.5	17	1.5	1.0	6	24
	Basic	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-
Total:				77			139			148	364

Appendix 10. Social Studies: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year, and Achievement Level. (N = 352)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	.4	.2	5	1.1	.8	10	.6	.5	9	24
	Int.	.5	.0	1	.6	1.1	19	.4	.8	27	47
	Basic	.4	.5	3	.0	.0	2	.2	.3	12	17
Mill Town	Adv.	1.1	1.2	18	2.6	2.4	14	3.2	2.8	12	44
	Int.	.8	1.0	3	.7	1.1	13	1.4	1.5	19	35
	Basic	.2	.3	2	.0	.0	1	.7	.7	9	12
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.2	.5	15	.6	.5	15	2.8	3.5	16	46
	Int.	.3	.3	12	.7	.8	19	2.6	3.5	24	55
	Basic	.9	1.3	2	1.0	1.0	3	.3	.6	3	8
Newton	Adv.	2.7	2.6	6	1.5	1.4	24	1.1	1.2	11	41
	Int.	.6	.0	1	1.1	1.0	17	1.0	.8	5	23
	Basic	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-
Total:				68			137			147	352

Appendix 11. Science: Average weekly time spent on homework according to School, Year, and Achievement Level. (N = 364)

School	Achievement Level	Mean Hours									Total
		Year 8			Year 9			Year 10			
		m	s	n	m	s	n	m	s	n	
Berry Mount	Adv.	.1	.2	7	1.1	1.3	15	.5	.5	8	30
	Int.	.1	.3	8	.5	.5	18	.3	.4	33	59
	Basic	.2	.3	3	.1	.1	2	.8	1.1	8	13
Mill Town	Adv.	3.2	1.9	14	2.6	2.9	12	2.1	2.5	14	40
	Int.	.2	.2	6	.8	.9	14	1.1	1.2	18	38
	Basic	.6	.7	3	.4	.0	1	.3	.6	8	12
Cedar Brook	Adv.	.3	.3	13	.3	.5	18	.8	.9	16	47
	Int.	.3	.5	14	.3	.3	15	.9	1.6	23	52
	Basic	.2	.3	2	.1	.1	4	.2	.2	4	10
Newton	Adv.	.7	.7	6	2.1	.9	23	3.9	2.9	10	39
	Int.	.0	.0	1	.5	.5	17	1.5	1.0	6	24
	Basic	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-
Total:				77			139			148	364

APPENDIX 12

Teachers' Preferences for Types of Homework

Teachers' Preference for the Types of Homework

	% teachers mentioned using it				% teachers using it most			
	N=8 Cedar Brook	N=11 Mill Town	N=9 Berry Mount	N=28 Total	N=8 Cedar Brook	N=11 Mill Town	N=9 Berry Mount	N=28 Total
Finish off	87% 7	100% 11	100% 9	96%	87% 7	82% 9	89% 8	86%
Preparation	50% 4	36% 4	33% 3	39%				
Research	37% 3	73% 8	66% 6	61%	13% 1	18% 2		11%
Enrichment	37% 3	36% 4	22% 2	32%				
Revision	37% 3	82% 9	77% 7	68%			11% 1	4%
Other	13% 1	0%	0%	4%				